

J.C. Hutcheson

## "Young Tom Bowling"

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### Chapter One.

#### Father and I "Argue the Point."

"Hullo, father!" I sang out, when we had got a little way out from the pontoon and opened the mouth of the harbour, noticing, as I looked over my shoulder to see how we were steering, a string of flags being run up aboard the old *Saint Vincent*. "They're signalling away like mad this morning all over the shop! First, atop of the dockyard semaphore; and then the flagship and the old *Victory*, both of 'em, blaze out in bunting; while now the *Saint Vincent* joins in at the game of 'follow-my-leader.' I wonder what's up?"

"Lor' bless you, Tom!" rejoined father, still steadily tugging on at his stroke oar as we pursued our course towards the middle of the stream, so that we might take advantage of the last of the flood, and allow the gradually slackening tide, which was nearly at the turn, to drift us down alongside the old *Victory*, whither we were bound to pick up a fare for the shore—"nothing in pertickler's up anyways uncommon that I sees, sonny; and as for the buntin' that you're making sich a fuss about, why, they've hauled all that down, and pretty near unbent all the signal flags, too, and stowed 'em away in their lockers by this time!"

"But, father," I persisted, "they don't always go on like this for nothing, I know!"

"In coorse they don't, stoopid!" said he, giving the water an angry splash as he reached forwards, the blade of his oar sending up a tidy sprinkle across my face. "Why, where's your wits, Tom, this mornin'?"

"Where you put them, father," I replied with a laugh; "you know I'm your son, and mother says I'm 'a chip of the old block' whenever she's a bit put out with me."

"None o' your imporence, Tom," said he, laughing too; for he and I were the best of friends, and I don't think we ever had a

serious difference about anything since first I was able to toddle down to the Hard, a little mite of four or five, to see him put off in his wherry, and sometimes go out for a sail with him on the sly when mother wasn't watching us, up to the time, as now, when I could help him with an oar. "None o' your impotence, you young jackanapes. But touching that there signallin', I'm surprised, sonny, you don't know by this time that when the commander-in-chief up at Admiralty House, in the dockyard, wishes for to communicate to some ship out at Spithead, he telegraphs from his office to the semaphore, which h'ists his orders, and then every ship in port's bound to repeat the signal till the craft he means it for runs up her answering pennant, for to show us how she's took the signal in and underconstubled it."

"Oh yes, father, I know that," said I, leading him on purposely. "But what is the signal they've been so busy about this morning? I can't make it out at all."

Father snorted indignantly.

"Tom Bowling, junior, I'm right down ashamed on you for a son o' mine!" he said, digging away at his oar savagely, as if trying to dredge up some of the silt from the bottom of the harbour. "You, turned fifteen year old, and been back'ard and forrard 'twixt Hardway and the Gosport shore for a matter of five years or more, and not for to know and read a common signal like that, which you must 'a seed run up at the semaphore or on board the *Dook* a hundred times at least. Lor'! I'm jest 'shamed of you, that's what I be!"

"But that ain't telling me, father," I retorted, "what *is* the signal. You needn't make such a blooming mystery of it, like that chap we saw t'other night at the theayeter!"

In return for my 'cheek' he splashed the water over me again.

"Well, if you don't know it, sonny, which I can hardly believe on, and wants for to know to improve your mind, which needs a lot of improvement, as I knows, that theer signal, Tom, was that cruiser we saw out at Spithead yesterday a-trying her speed at the measured mile, the *Mercury*, I thinks she is, axin' the port-admiral if she might have her sailin' orders; and look there, sonny, the 'affirmative' 's now run up at the mizzen aboard the *Dook*, over yonder!"

"Yes, father," said I, playing him artfully, like the wily old fish he was, with an object which you will soon learn—"and what does that mean?"

"What does that mean? You blessed young h'ignoramus! Why, Tommy, your brains be all wool-gathered this mornin'! Can't you see that old Sir Ommaney is tellin' the cruiser to 'carry on' as soon as she likes, and bid adoo to Spithead when she's weighed her anchor? See, too, sonny, the old *Vict'ry* and the *Saint Vincent* be now a-repeatin' the signal arter the *Dook*, the same as they did that first h'ist, jest now!"

"That is, father," said I innocently like—"the port-admiral gives that cruiser outside permission to go to sea?"

"Aye, Tom," he answered, without suspecting what my inquiry was leading up to—"that's just it. You've reckoned it up to a nicety, my hearty."

Now came the opportunity for which I had been waiting.

"The old port-admiral may be a martinet, as they say, in the dockyard," I said; "but he's a kinder chap than you are, father."

"The admiral kinder than me, sonny," he repeated, in a surprised tone—"why, how's that, Tom?"

"Because he gives leave when he's asked for a fellow to go to sea."

We were just then about midway between the *Saint Vincent* and the old *Victory*; and, startled by my thus unexpectedly broaching my masked battery, father dropped his oar and let the wherry drift along the almost motionless tideway towards the stern of Nelson's whilom flagship, which was slowly swinging round nearer us on the bosom of the stream, thus showing that the ebb was setting in, or, rather, out.

"You owdacious young monkey!" he cried, slewing his head round on his shoulders, even as the old *Victory's* hull slewed with the tide, so that he could look me full in the face. "So, my joker, that's the little rig you're a-tryin' to try on with me, Master Tommy, is it?"

"It ain't no rig, father," said I sturdily, sticking to my guns, now that the cat was out of the bag. "I can't see why you won't let me go to sea. I'm sure I've asked you often enough."

"Aye; and I'm sure I've had to refuse you jest as often."

"Why, father?"

"For your own good, sonny."

"I can't see it, father," I rejoined. "Look at them *Saint Vincent* boys in that cutter a-crossing our bows now. How jolly they all seems working at their proper calling, just as I'd like to be!"

"Aye, mebbe," said father, in his sententious way, cocking his eye as the cutter sped on its way towards the training-ship. "But jest you look at me, Tom, and see what forty years' sailerin', man and boy, have done for one o' the same kidney as them boys, jolly though they seems now. Poor young beggars, they all has their troubles afore 'em!"

"Most of us have our troubles, father," I replied to this bit of moral philosophy of his, speaking just in his own manner. "So our old parson said on Sunday last, when mother and Jenny and I went to church. We are all bound to have them, he said, whether on sea or on land; and I can't say as how a sailor has the worst chance."

"Ship my rullocks, Tom, can't ye? Jest you look at me!"

"Why, father?" I asked. "What's the use of that?"

"None o' your impotence, Master Tommy; jest you look at me!"

"All right, father," said I. "I am a-looking at you now!"

"Very good, Tom—one dog one bone! Well, what d'ye see?"

"I see a brave sailor and a gallant defender of his country," I answered, giving the bow oar I was pulling a vicious dig into the water as I spoke, like as if I were tackling one of the Queen's enemies; "I see a man who has got no cause to be ashamed of his past life, though he might be getting on in years—you are that, father, you know; and one who has won his medal with four clasps for hard fighting. In real wars, mind you, not your twopenny ha'penny Bombardment of Alexandria business!—aye, I see one who ought to wear the Victoria Cross if he had his rights. That's what I see, father."

"Bosh, Tom, none o' your flummery," said he, grinning as he always does at the mention of the Egyptian affair which they made such a fuss about, just when I was a little nipper learning to run about, and that old men-o'-war-men thought all the more ridiculous from its contrast to Admiral Hornby's rushing the British fleet through the Dardanelles, and stopping the Russians in their march to victory at the very gates of

Constantinople, shortly before, in the days of 'old Dizzy'—which was really a deed to boast of, if any one wanted to talk of the British Lion showing his teeth and wagging his tail, as he did when he 'meant business' in the good old days of Nelson! Aye, that was 'something like,' father says; and worth all the 'bronze stars' in the Khedive's collection of leather medals! "None o' your flummery, Tom; you only wants to put me off my course, you rascal, so as to make me forget what I were a-talking about. But I don't forget, sonny! Look at me, I says, and see what I've come to, with my forty year o' sailerin' all about the world an' furrin parts—a poor rhumenaticky chap as is half a cripple, forced to eke out his miserable pension of a bob an' a tanner a day by pulling a rotten old tub of a boat back'ards and forruds, up and down Porchm'uth Harbo'r, a-tryin' to gain an honest livin', an' jest only arnin' bread an' cheese at that!"

"Oh, father!" said I. "How about that rabbit smothered in onions we had yesterday for dinner, and the 'tidy little sum' you told me you and mother had in the Savings Bank? Besides that, we've bought the freehold of our little house at Bonfire Corner, I know, father, and there's the bird-shop and all the stock!"

"You knows too much, Master Tom, I'm a-thinking," he rejoined, scratching his head again, as he always did, as now, when he was in a quandary about anything, especially when any one had got the better of him in an argument, or, as he said, 'weathered' on him, and he wasn't quite prepared with an answer, reaching over the sternsheets of the wherry and dipping the blade of his oar, ready to make a stroke. "But, look out, my lad! I think we'd better be a-going alongside now. Ain't that a jolly there, signalling to us from the entry-port o' the old *Victory*?"

"Aye, father," said I, for I had seen the marine holding up his hand to summon us before he spoke. "The court-martial must be over sooner than was expected."

"Not a bit of it, Tom," he replied, as he and I bent our backs and made the boat spin along towards the old flagship, fetching the gangway at the foot of the accommodation ladder on the starboard side in half a dozen strokes. "The ship's corporal told me it'd last all day. It's only them lawyer chaps wanting to get ashore to their lunch, that's all. Those landsharks be as hungry arter their vittles as they is for their fees, Tom; they be rare hands, them lawyers, for keeping their weather eyes open, and is all on the look-out for whatsomedever they can pick up. They be all fur grabbin' an' grabbin', that they be, or I'm a Dutchman!"

"Really, father?" I said innocently, as I stood up in the bows of the wherry and hung on by a boathook to one of the ringbolts in the side of the old three-decker that towered up above our heads, waiting to help in a couple of gentlemen who came hurrying down the accommodation ladder to take passage with us. "Why, I thought you and mother wanted me to go into a lawyer's office and become one of those very same sort of chaps!"

"I'd rayther see you an honest sailor, like your father an' grandfather afore you," he answered, with some heat, unthinkingly; and then, catching my eye, he grinned, recognising how seriously he had committed himself by this rash utterance after his previous advice respecting the unsatisfactory character of the vocation he now extolled, and he muttered under his breath while lending his arm to assist the gentlemen to pass astern on their jumping into the boat. "Ship my rullocks, you young rascal! Don't you sit there grinning and winking at me, like a Cheshire cat eatin' green cheese, thinkin' no doubt you've got to win'ard of me; though, I'm blest, sonny, if I didn't nearly slip my painter then!"

The rudder of the wherry being shipped, one of the gentlemen took the yoke lines as he sat down in the sternsheets facing father, handling them in a manner that showed he was no novice.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed presently, looking steadily at father, as he steered us aslant the tide so as not to check the way of the boat, while making straight for the pontoon across the stream, which was now running out, like a regular good coxswain. "Aren't you Tom Bowling?"

"Aye, aye, sir, that's my rating," said father, looking at him in his turn. "But I can't say as how I can place your honour;—though, ship my rullocks, if it ain't young Mister Mordaunt; 'Gentleman Jack' we used to call you on the lower deck aboard the old *Blazer*—beg pardon for taking the liberty, sir!"

"Yes, I'm that same, Bowling, only grown a bit since then in stature and likewise in years; for none of us can manage to work a traverse on old Father Time and grow younger," said the other, laughing lightheartedly and showing his white teeth as he stretched out his hand to father in the most cordial way, like a real gentleman, as if he were a friend and fellow-sailor. "I'm very glad to see you again—aye, and looking so hale and hearty, too, old shipmate!"

"So am I to see you, sir," rejoined father, resting on his oar, while the two exchanged a good grip of their fists; I also stopping pulling, of course, and grinning in sympathy. "Why, I were only talking about you last pension day to Bill Murphy—You remembers Bill; don't you, sir? He wer' cap'en of the foretop in the *Blazer* with us, Mr Mordaunt—a little chap with ginger hair."

"Oh yes, I recollect Murphy well enough. He was a mad Irishman, always full of fun and mischief," rejoined the other, smiling at the remembrance of some joke in which the chap of whom they spoke had part. "But you must put a handle to my name, Bowling; I'm posted now."

"Beg pardon, cap'en, I didn't know it, in course, or wouldn't have forgot my manners," said father, raising his hand in salute; and then, gripping the loom of his oar, he started a long steady stroke towards the pontoon at the foot of the railway jetty, on the Portsea shore, abreast of the old *Victory*; I following suit, of course. "You won't mind an old seaman, sir, 'gratlatin' you, sir, on getting your step so young? Ship my rullocks, why, it do seem but t'other day when you were a mite of a middy along o' me!"

"Time flies, my man; and if youth were the only bar to our promotion we'd soon be all admirals of the fleet," said the other, laughing again. "Why, it's more than twenty years ago, Bowling, since we were in the old *Blazer* together."

"Aye, I knows that, Cap'en Mordaunt," replied father, in his dry way; "an' I knows, too, that there's many a youngster o' yer own standing as ain't got further than liftenant yet, sir! It's only the smart officers like yerself that gits promoted."

"Well, well, we won't argue about that, Bowling; 'kissing,' you know, sometimes 'goes by favour,'" said father's old friend, smiling; and then, to turn the current of conversation from this rather personal theme, Captain Mordaunt, as I afterwards found out for myself when I sailed with him, being of a singularly modest and retiring disposition, he abruptly asked, "This your son, eh?"

"Yes, sir—Cap'en Mordaunt, I means, sir," replied father. "I've got one darter as is older; but he's my only son."

"How old is he now?"

"Fifteen years an' ten months," said father, after careful consideration and much counting on his fingers. "He'll be sixteen next April, on 'Primrose Day,' as they call it."

"Another Tom Bowling, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said father. "He's 'young Tom,' an' I'm the 'old un' now!"

"Humph! He's a fine grown young chip for his age. What are you going to make of him? He ought to be a sailor and serving the Queen by now, like his father before him!"

Father 'hummed' and 'hawed,' not knowing what to answer to this; while I burned all over with joy at having so potent an advocate coming to my aid in this unexpected way.

Captain Mordaunt saw this: though anybody could have seen it from one glance at my face; for if I grinned 'like a Cheshire cat eating green cheese' on ordinary occasions, as father used to say, why, I must have looked now as if I had bolted all the cheese in one lump, and it had stuck in my throat, keeping my mouth open on the stretch!

So, noticing this, father's old friend put the question to me point-blank.

"I think, youngster, you've pretty well made up your mind already in the matter, if I'm not very much mistaken," said he to me, as I unshipped my oar and stood up in the bow of the wherry, ready to fend her off from the pontoon as we ran up alongside, right under the stern of one of the Ryde steamers that was just backing out from the railway pier above us. "You'd like to go to sea, young Tom, I'm sure, eh?"

"There's nothing I should like better, sir," I answered glibly enough, catching hold of one of the piles of the pier with my boathook and bringing up the wherry easily to the landing-stage. "I only wish you'd coax my father, sir, to let me be a sailor!"

"Now, Bowling, my old friend," said this new ally of mine, who, it struck me, would turn out to be a very important factor in this decision anent my future destiny, "the matter rests entirely with you. 'Toby or not Toby,' as Hamlet says in the play. Is your son, young Tom here, to go to sea or not?"



Father took off his hat with his right hand and scratched his head deliberately and deliberately with his left, 'humming' and 'hawing' over this crucial question.

"Well, sir—Cap'en Mordaunt that is, begging your pardon, sir, ag'in," said he—"as you goes on to make sich a favour on it, sir, we'll see about it, sir."

"See about it?—Stuff and nonsense, Bowling, my man, that won't do for me!" exclaimed the other, as, resting his hand lightly on my shoulder as he crossed the thwarts, he stepped out of the wherry on to the landing-stage. "I tell you what it is, young Tom must go to sea, my man—aye, and to-morrow too!"

"Lor' sakes, you're just the same, sir, as you were aboard the old *Blazer* twenty years ago!" said father, breaking into a regular horse-laugh, which he never did except something particularly funny tickled his fancy. "You allers gave your orders sharp as a youngster, and some of us used for to call you 'Commander Jack' sometimes. Lor', I remembers it all as if it wer' but yesterday!"

"All right, Bowling, I'm glad your memory is so good," replied Captain Mordaunt, standing on the pontoon and looking down at us, with a smile on his cheery, handsome face. "You will remember, too, that my word was always as good as any bond, and when I say a thing I mean a thing! I'm stopping for a day or two at the Keppel's Head, and if you'll come over there this evening after dinner, or send young Tom, should you like that better than a glass of grog, why, I will give you a letter for him to take on board the *Saint Vincent* to the commander, who's an old friend of mine like yourself, and we'll have young Tom entered on the books of the training-ship in a brace of shakes!"

"Thank you kindly, sir," said father, raising his hand to his cap again in salute as the captain turned to leave us. "You're very good, sir, for to h'interest yourself, sir, in this yere young scamp of a son o' mine, sir!"

"Not a bit of it, Bowling, not a bit of it," rejoined the other cheerily, as he chucked father a sovereign for his fare ashore, and told him to be sure to come up to the Keppel's Head on the Hard and see him in the evening for the letter of introduction for me. "It's a shame that such a likely young fellow should not be allowed to follow in his father's footsteps and turn out as brave and handy a sailor as himself. He's a born seaman, every inch of him, Bowling, and a regular chip of the old block!"

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## Chapter Two.

### "A Chip of the Old Block!"

"Oh!" exclaimed mother, when an hour or so later father set about explaining the matter of our meeting Captain Mordaunt, and his promise of sending me aboard the *Saint Vincent* to be trained for the service. "You just go and tell that to the marines! Don't you try on any of your old yarns with me!"

"I ain't a-tryin' on nothing, old woman," protested father, after a vain attempt to continue his dinner, bolting a piece of potato, which stuck in his throat and set him coughing. "I'm a-tellin' you the honest truth, Sarah, that I be!"

"Well, and suppose it is true," retorted mother, giving him a slap on the back to send the obstructive potato down, "p'raps you'll tell me, Tom Bowling, how Jenny and I are a-going to get along without young Tom? Who's going to look after the birds in the mornin's, I'd like to know—with twelve dozen fresh canaries a-comin' from Norwich the day arter to-morrow, too?"

"Oh, we'll manage all right, mother," put in my sister Jenny, with a merry laugh. "You'll make Tom conceited if you let him think we cannot get along without him!"

She was a bright, fairy-like little creature, with beautiful hazel eyes, and a wealth of brown hair on her tiny head that was a veritable crown of glory, reaching below her waist, and looking like a tangle of gold when the sun played upon it; and, somehow or other, she was the life and light of our home, always having a kind word for everybody, and ever acting as the peacemaker when any little difference arose between father and mother, as sometimes happens in most family circles.

Father and I when out together in the wherry, talking over home matters, would often wonder where Jenny could have come from, she was so different to all of us; mother being a big stout woman, with dark hair and eyes; while father 'belonged to Pharaoh's lean kine,' as the country folks say, being tall, and thin, and wiry, with as little flesh on his bones as a scaffolding pole. In this respect, I may add, he was said to resemble all the Bowlings ever mentioned in history, up to the time of our remote ancestor, the celebrated Tom Bowling of Dibdin's song, who 'went aloft' more than a hundred years ago.

Aye, she was a pretty little girl was my sister Jenny, though but a mere slip of a thing to me, who almost stood a head and shoulders over her, and she, the mite, quite a year my elder; but, what is more to the purpose, she was as good as she was pretty, taking all the cares of the household off mother's hands and winding her, aye and father too, round her tiny fingers in whatever way she pleased when the fancy took her.

I used to like best seeing her, however, amongst the birds.

We lived in a queer little double-fronted, old-fashioned cottage near Bonfire Corner. This is close up against the dockyard wall, and not far from the Marlborough Gate, you must know, if you be a stranger to the old town of Portsmouth and that labyrinth of narrow streets lying to the north of Hardway and the harbour. Yes, a labyrinth of rectangular rows, arranged in parallel lines and all precisely alike, of twin two-storied, russet-bricked houses of the same size and pattern, all looking as if they had been turned out of a mould, and all of them having little projecting circular bay-windows of wood, mostly English live oak, or teak from the Eastern Indies. All were painted green alike, and furnished with diamond panes, or bottle glass with bull's-eye centres, of the last century; and all, likewise, had similarly retreating doorways, sheltered by timber pent-houses to keep off the rain, access to them being gained by three or four perpendicular steps, so as to avoid flooding from the rivers of mud that covered the cobblestone roadway in wet weather, overflowing the narrow gutters, and narrower flagging along the side that did duty for a pavement.

Attached to our cottage was an out-house which ran flush along the side of Beacon Street, fencing off our bit of a garden from the road and an adjacent tenement; and this out-house, mother, who was of an inventive nature, with a strong proclivity for money-making, had converted into a shop for the sale of all sorts of birds, both foreign and native born, and pigeons, in addition to sundry specimens of the rarer species of poultry.

Mother said she had been forced into the trade from the necessity of her having to do 'something for a living' after grandfather's death, on account of her having us two children to keep, as well as herself, on only the allotment pay of father, who was away at sea at the time; but, in a weak moment she once confessed she had started the bird-keeping business more for the sake of having her hands employed than anything else, she not being partial to needlework, like most west-country women, while she was particularly fond of birds!

Not only that, she was certainly accustomed to their feathery ways, and learned in the art of their breeding and bringing up, even from the nest; for Jenny and I could bear witness to having seen her often enough poking pap with a stick down the outstretched throats of gaping young blackbirds and thrushes as soon as they had sufficiently developed beaks to open, and coddling up shivering little canaries and larklets in flannel before the fire when their proper parents would not attend to their infantile needs—mother tenderly feeding them with the point of a camel's-hair brush dipped in egg paste and weak wine and water before they were old enough even to 'peep' or flutter their nascent little wings.

Bye-and-bye, when my sister got big enough, she took charge of all this part of the business, and saved mother a world of trouble, as she thankfully acknowledged, without being a bit jealous of her greater success with the fledgelings; for Jenny handled the little things as tenderly as if she were a canary herself, and was so fortunate in her treatment of them, medical and otherwise, that she never lost even the most delicate of her bird baby patients, nursing them through their various ailments, and rearing them triumphantly up to the full perfection of their plumage and song.

You should only have seen her amongst them of a morning when I had the job of cleaning out their cages, while Jenny gave them all fresh food and water!

They did not pay much attention to me, save to flutter a bit as I moved them about, and especially when I put my hand between the bars of their little wooden prisons; but with Jenny the case was very different.

"Bless you!" as father would say, every one of them knew her and recognised her as a friend and fellow-comrade, for she would sing to them sometimes like a lark, which always set them all on the twitter; goldfinches, linnets, and bullfinches, of which mother kept a large stock, hopping about their cages trying by every means in their power to attract her notice on her entering the shop and coming near them; while the lemon-crested cockatoo, who was christened 'Ally Sloper,' on account of his fine flow of language, and a habit he had of ruffling up the feathers round his neck when spoken to, making him look as if he had a particularly high and stiff collar on, would shriek out 'Say-rah!' which was mother's name, just as if father were shouting for her to come downstairs in a sort of 'reef topsails' on a stormy night sort of voice.

Our pet thrush 'Jack' also liked her better than any of us, though he was tame enough to eat out of my hand, giving me a friendly nip with his sharp beak occasionally, just to show what he could do if he had a mind to and was not socially disposed.

But he never nipped Jenny's little fingers—not he!

On the contrary, he used to dance with delight if she only uttered his name in a whisper, chuckling first to express his great pleasure at the sight of her, and then breaking into a regular roulade that wound up with the call 'Jenny! Jenny!' or something which we all thought sounded uncommonly like it; for he used to keep it up for a good spell if she went away without speaking to him, or even failed to put in an appearance to wish him "good morning."

Avast there, however.

I'm afraid I am making a long circumbendibus from my original yarn; but, as mother says of father, it runs in the blood, all the Bowlings having their jaw tackle well abreast, and not knowing when to stop when once they begin; so, being a 'chip of the old block' and a Bowling all over in my love of talking and love for the sea, I hope you will excuse me and let me start afresh again.

I was saying when I went off my course on this tangent about the birds, that little Jenny stepped in just as father and mother were getting to loggerheads about my going on board the *Saint Vincent*, the old lady saying she couldn't possibly spare me, and that he, to put it mildly, was not a very sensible person to think so lightly of losing my services in the wherry just when I was beginning, as she pointed out to him, to be of some use to him.

"But it's no good my talking," she cried at the end of a long harangue, to which father politely listened, with his knife and fork expectantly in hand, and his dinner getting colder and colder on the plate before him. "It's just like you Bowlings all over! You're all headstrong and foolish, and always bent on having your own way, in spite of all the good advice one gives you!"

"All right, Sarah," said father, in his quiet way, bowing, wise man that he was, before the storm. "All right."

"No, it's nothing of the sort," retorted mother. "It's all wrong!"

At that moment a happy diversion was made by the lemon-crested cockatoo, who, by reason of his highly respectable deportment and polished manners, had been made free of our parlour, and could hop in and out from the shop when the mood seized him, through a small trapdoor or porthole, originally constructed for a window, and which served 'Ally Sloper' as a means of intercommunication between the two apartments, the wily bird being easily able to unlatch at pleasure the swing door of his cage.

"I'll wring your neck!" he screamed in his hoarse, sepulchral voice; "I'll wring your neck! Say-rah! Say-rah!"

This, of course, made us all laugh, even mother joining in, though the joke was certainly against her; and taking advantage of the opportunity thus afforded of 'throwing oil on the troubled waters,' little Jenny went on to speak of the advantages to be gained by my going to sea and earning my living as a gallant seaman in the service of my country, pointing out to mother how I had always hankered after father's profession, and that she was sure I would never be contented in any shore billet, and might possibly go to the bad if I had my inclinations thwarted!

"Who knows, too," she added, as a clincher to her argument, "whether Tom may not rise to be a leftenant, ay, and even an admiral, through this good Captain Mordaunt's introduction!"

"Right you are, my lass, bless you!" chimed in father, rising up enthusiastically from his seat and tossing off the glass of beer he held in his hand. "So he will too, you'll see, or I'm a Dutchman. Hurrah, Sarah, here's good luck to the boy and speedy promotion!"

"'Oo-ray, Say-rah!" screamed 'Ally Sloper,' the cockatoo, in cordial appreciation, apparently, of this sentiment. "'Ip, 'ip, 'oo-ray!"

That settled the matter.

So, early the following morning, after an affectionate hug from mother and a kiss from Jenny, who came to the corner to see the last of me, I started off for the *Saint Vincent* with father, who rowed me aboard himself, I being the very first fare he had for the day, though, of course, as you can imagine, he did not earn much by the job.

However, it pleased father at any rate; and, as soon as he had landed me safe and sound at the foot of the accommodation ladder on the port side of the old ship, which lay broadside on, almost on the mud abreast of Haslar Creek, the tide being out, he handed me a big official letter which Captain Mordaunt had given him overnight, as he had promised, recommending me to the commander of the training-vessel, and enclosing certificates of my birth and character.

"There, sonny, them's yer papers," said he, thus laconically wishing me good-bye, sheering off out of the way of an approaching galley from the shore whose sternsheets were chock-full of big quartern loaves of bread, and then laying on his oars as I skipped up the ladder. "You jest give that there letter to the cap'en when you sees him, and good luck to you, my lad!"

I waved my hand in reply as he sculled away, all alone now in the wherry, towards the flagship to try and pick up some stray passenger for Gosport or Hardway; and the next instant I had gained the top of the accommodation ladder, and was standing within the entry-port leading on to the middle deck.

"Hullo!" cried a bluejacket stationed at the gangway, who, I noticed, had a red stripe on his arm, and subsequently learnt was one of the ship's corporals, who serve as police always aboard a man-of-war. "What do you want here, boy?"

"I've come to join the ship, sir," said I to him respectfully, seeing that he was some one in authority, and having been taught by father to be deferential to everybody, especially those who were my superiors, respect to rank and station being the very essence of the discipline of the service. "Got a letter for the cap'en."

"Give it here, my lad," said the man more civilly to me, calling to a marine close by. "I'll have the letter passed off to him at once; and you'd best step into the office there and wait till the master-at-arms can see you."

So saying, he pointed to a large open sort of cabin, with glass sides to it, immediately adjoining the entry-port, where I found a couple of boys of about my own age, and who had evidently come aboard on a similar errand.

One of these was a red-haired, short, thickset fellow, with an ugly, bulldog sort of a face, whose beetle-brows met over a pair

of ferrety eyes, giving him a most forbidding appearance, and I did not like the look of him at all.

The other was a poor ragged chap, without any shoes to his feet; but he had a jaunty devil-me-care air, and such a pleasant smile and merry twinkle about the corners of his mouth, that I could not help taking a fancy to him, at once hoping that we might be chums.

However, I did not have much time for reflection anent either of them; for hardly had we taken stock of each other, when a stoutish middle-aged man, dressed in a tight-fitting monkey-jacket, ornamented with the letters 'NP' on the collar, and a row of bright crown-and-anchor buttons down the front, besides having a gold badge bearing the same device over the mohair band of his blue peaked cap, appeared at the doorway of the cabin, or 'police office,' as the place is properly called, where we three boys were waiting anxiously to learn our fate.

"Ha, humph! A nice lot of raw material to be licked into shape!" observed this gentleman, whose uniform denoted that he was the master-at-arms, or head of the ship's police. He was evidently cogitating within himself as to our respective and collective capabilities, for he eyed us critically the while as we stood before him, hats off and mute as mice. "Hi, my lads! I fancy I know what you're after this fine morning. You want to join the service, I can see, eh?"

"Yes, sir," the three of us shouted in three different keys—"yes, sir—yes, sir!"

"Keep your hair on, lads," he said, amused at our eagerness. "Got your papers all right, eh?"

To this the ugly chap, as well as the one to whom I had taken a liking, responded by handing over to the master-at-arms certain official documents representing their certificate of birth to show they were of the proper age, and a declaration of their parents that they were joining Her Majesty's Service with their full consent and goodwill.

When it came to my turn, though, I had absolutely nothing to show.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the master-at-arms. "Where are your papers, young 'un?"



I was about to explain; but the ship's corporal who had first spoken to me at the entry-port and taken on to the captain the letter from Captain Mordaunt which father had handed to me, saved all further trouble.

"Here are Tom Bowling's certificates, sir," said he, giving the couple of sheets of foolscap in question to his superior officer. "The cap'en says they're all right, and he's to be entered if he passes the schoolmaster and is medically fit."

"That's all right, then, Mister Bowling," said the master-at-arms to me, with a mock bow. "Hullo, though, Bowling—Bowling? It strikes me I've heard that name before, my lad. Father in the service, eh?"

"He *has* served in the navy, sir," I replied. "But he's a pensioner now, and works as a waterman up and down the harbour."

"Ah, I thought so! He and I were old shipmates together out in the Ashantee War on the West Coast, and I recollect him well. You are very like him, too, I can see now from the cut of your jib, youngster! You're a regular chip of the old block."

"So everybody says, sir," I said with a grin. "I only hope, sir, I will turn out as good a sailor!"

"Only act up to that wish, my boy, and you'll do! I say, corporal, take these three lads down to the schoolmaster and see what he makes of them."

With that, giving me a friendly nod, the master-at-arms dismissed us, and the ship's corporal conducted us down the nearest hatchway to the lower deck.

At the other end of this we three neophytes were ushered into a large apartment, fitted with rows of desks and benches, arranged in parallel lines, which gave it the appearance of an ordinary schoolroom ashore; the only difference being that there was a harmonium on one side, and a cottage piano on the other, while a large circular band-stand stood in between the two in the centre.

Here one of the assistant-masters took charge of us, placing 'Ugly' and 'Rattlebrains,' as I had mentally christened my two companions, along with myself at a table in a corner of the room, away from the rest of the boys, some three hundred odd in number, who were all busy at their lessons.

No great obstacle to our joining the service was put in our way by the examination which we underwent; for, after being asked to spell a few easy words, tested as to our arithmetic with a sum in simple addition, and the multiplication table as far as six times six, besides being given a short sentence from some reader to write from dictation, the head schoolmaster filled up a form, which he attached to our papers, notifying that we were sufficiently educated to become *Saint Vincent* boys.

Our ordeal was thus ended.

The three of us were then escorted back again to the police office on the middle deck, where our papers were again handed to the master-at-arms to show that the regulations had been complied with.

This functionary did not seem at all surprised at our reappearance.

"Ha, Bowling, so you've passed your schooling all right, my lad, eh?" he said to me. "I thought you'd manage to pull through, somehow or other; and you, too, young shaver—you with that fine pair of flesh-coloured stockings on, I mean! I can't quite make out your name here from the writing. It looks like 'Damerum,' or 'Dunekin,' or 'Donkeyvan,' or something of that sort! What do you call yourself, my lad, when you're at home, eh?"

"Donovan, sor," promptly answered my friend the ragged boy without any covering to his feet, whom, of course, he was addressing. "Me name's Mick Donovan, sor."

"An Irishman, eh?"

"No, sor; Oi'm an Oitalian, yer honour."

The master-at-arms burst out laughing, for really the devil-me-care chap's brogue was strong enough to have hung a kettle full of potatoes on it. Even the ship's corporal could not help smiling, though in the presence of his superior officer.

"Nonsense, boy, don't you try to gammon me," cried the master-at-arms, as soon as he was able to speak. "An Italian from the county Cork, I'm thinking!"

"Oi'm that same, yer honour," protested the other, as grave as a judge. "Me fayther came over here harvestin' last summer, sor, an' turned organ-grinder; an' now, sure, he's an Oitalian."

"Was it him that signed this paper?" asked the master-at-arms, when he was able to control his speech again after a second burst of merriment at the Irish boy's droll way of expressing himself, and comical look. "I s'pose it's his new foreign style of writing and spelling that prevented my making out your name at first?"

"Sure, sor, he wanted the praste fur to soign it," said the other in his racy brogue. "But Father Maloney said he'd be persecuted for bigummy if he did it, an' he'd have fur to do it himsilf; an' so, bad cess to it, fayther stuck the ind of his dhudeen in the ink-bottle, I'll take me oath, sor, an' soigned his name thare, sor, jist whare ye say it, wid his own hand, as Oi'm a livin' sinner!"

"Well, well, Donovan, that's enough. I'll take your word for it," said the master-at-arms, anxious to get rid of him, feeling his gravity giving way again. "But you'll first have to pass your medical examination, my lad, before you can join the ship. Corporal, take all three of them to the doctor in the sick-bay, at once!"

With that, the lot of us started off, in company with the corporal.

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## **Chapter Three.**

### **I Become an "Unclothed Boy!"**

"Look sharp, my lads!" sang out after us the master-at-arms, or "Jaunty" as he is always called on board ship. "The sick-bay's away there forrard on the starboard side; and if you're spry and pass the doctor soon, before the bugle sounds for 'cooks to their messes,' why, you'll be able to eat your first meal at Her Majesty's expense, my lads, afore you're a day older."

"Faith an' sure," rejoined our ragged comrade Mick Donovan innocently enough, as we hurried along the middle deck towards the fore part of the ship, under the tutelage of the corporal, "I'll pass the gintleman aisy an' civilly if he ounly comes foreninst me an' gives me a chance, begorrah, to go by him!"

The corporal sniggered at this audibly, not being any longer in the presence of his superior officer the master-at-arms, and therefore not now bound in the interests of discipline to repress

his emotions; and, in another minute, pushing aside a red curtain that hung in front of the open door of a cabin on the starboard side, forward of the galley, where there was an appetising smell of cookery going on that made my friend Mick sniff approvingly and wink at me, our conductor led the three of us into the doctor's quarters, or hospital of the ship, nautically styled the sick-bay.

Here, the sick-berth steward, distinguished by a red-cross badge within a circlet of gold on his arm, took us in tow, the corporal handing him our papers, which he in turn handed to the doctor, who was in the usual undress uniform of an officer, a thin line of red braid interlarded between the rows of gold lace on the cuff of his tunic sleeve betokening his special medical rank.

This gentleman was seated at a writing-table in a larger cabin amidships, opening out of the first apartment; and here I noticed there were a couple of hospital cots rigged up at the farther end, for the treatment, no doubt, of any urgent cases, such as a fall from aloft or other mishap which might happen on board the ship, prior to the removal of the patients to Haslar, which lay within convenient reach up the creek opposite.

The doctor looked up on our entrance from what seemed suspiciously like a copy of one of the daily journals, which he had been apparently studying with great interest; but, of course, I might have been mistaken.

He was a pleasant, easy-going gentleman, I thought; and when I spoke about him subsequently to father, he said he was probably like most of the 'sawbones' he had met with in his time in the Navy—"chaps as wouldn't let their sense of duty ever fret their minds too much!"

I could not help seeing now, that, though the steward held out our papers to him, he did not take the trouble to stretch out his hand for them; allowing the man to lay them on the table before him when he was tired of holding them out.

"Oh, that you, Trimmens?" he said languidly, as if he were too tired almost to get out the sentence, though he had a nice, agreeable voice. "What! You don't mean to say you've brought in another batch of boys to be examined?"

"Yes, sir," replied the sick-berth steward, opening his mouth, and closing it again with a sort of snap, and uttering the two words as one. "Three of 'em now, sir!"

"Why, that makes the fourth lot this morning!" exclaimed the other plaintively. "The ship'll be chock-full if they keep on coming in like this. Only at the beginning of the month, too!"

"Yes, sir," agreed the steward. "Shall I make a start with 'em, sir?"

"Oh yes, carry on, Trimmens," said the doctor, looking at his watch, and then sitting bolt upright in his chair with more alertness than he had yet displayed. "But, by Jove, you must look sharp! It's close on lunch time, and we haven't much time to spare."

"Yes, sir," answered the sick-berth steward in the same snappy, mechanical way; and then, turning to us, he said, "Which of ye came first, boys?"

"Me, zur," replied 'Ugly,' stepping forwards. "I were first aboard this mornin'; an', by rights, I comes first."

"Boys have no rights in the Navy, or wrongs either if they behave themselves properly," observed the doctor, giving my joker a 'snop' for his bumptiousness. "What's your name?"

"Reeks," replied 'Ugly,' a bit abashed. "My name be Moses Reeks, zur."

"Leeks?"

"No-a, zur, Reeks. We spells it with a 'har,' double 'he,' and a 'k' and a 'hess,' zur."

"Oh, all right, Reeks; but it looks uncommonly like Leeks on your paper here; and I thought you were a Welshman," said the doctor, smiling at his queer Hampshire pronunciation; for some of the chaps down our way speak just as badly as the cockneys in the east end of London, especially those coming from the country part beyond Cosham and Fareham. "Now, strip off your clothes to the waist, Reeks, and you, Trimmens, just take his chest measurement, please. You need not take off your trousers, boy!"

He added this caution in the nick of time, for 'Ugly' appeared about to peel off everything, to his naked pelt!

The sick-berth steward then proceeded to put a tape-measure round his body, just under the armpits, compassing his chest.

"He's just the regulation, sir," he said, after inspecting the measure. "Thirty-one inches, sir, exactly."

The doctor looked at Reeks's papers again.

"Ah, yes, all right, his age is under sixteen, I see," said he. "Just test his height, Trimmens."

The sick-bay steward took Reeks to the bulkhead opposite, where was a standard for measurement, the same as they keep in barrack-rooms.

"He's five feet two, sir," he called out—"to a h'inch, sir."

"All right, that'll do," said the doctor. "I don't think Mr Reeks will grow much more, though; he's too thickset. Get me my stethoscope, Trimmens, and I'll sound his lungs and heart."

The doctor's examination appeared satisfactory, for he made a note on 'Ugly's' papers; and he was then made to hop across the cabin on each foot alternately and swing from a hook suspended to the deck above with either hand; after which his sight was tested, to see whether he could distinguish colours at a distance, besides being made pick out variously formed letters placed six feet or so away from him. The ordeal was completed with an inquiry as to the state of his bowels!

"You'll do all right," said the doctor, signing his papers to show he had complied with the requirements of the service. "Next boy!"

This, of course, was Mick Donovan, who gave out his name clearly enough; but, on the order being given him to strip, he seemed somewhat abashed, as if reluctant to comply with this request.

The doctor, very kindly, I thought, seemed to anticipate the poor lad's reason for hesitating.

"Never mind, my boy, if your shore toggery is a bit seedy," he said. "You'll soon be blooming out in a bran-new sailor's rig, and be as good as anybody!"

At this, Mick slipped off his ragged jacket at once, dragging an even more tattered shirt over his head. But I noticed though, and so did the doctor too, who had pretty sharp eyes of his own in spite of his somewhat indolent demeanour, that, if poor Mick's garment was ragged, as indeed it was—aye, and 'holy'

enough to have served his patriot saint, Saint Patrick, for a vestment—the shirt, or rather the remnant of the article, was scrupulously clean. The Irish boy's skin also appeared much more accustomed to soap and water than that of the ugly Reeks, who, I saw, regarded my new friend with contempt, though he seemed to me a very dirty fellow, if outwardly better dressed.

However, in spite of his dilapidated raiment, Mick passed all the medical tests; though he had a narrow squeak in regard to the dimensions of his chest, failing in the proper measurement for his age by just an eighth of an inch.

"Faith, sor, I'll fill out soon enough whin I git outside ov a good male or two," pleaded the defaulter, on the sick-berth steward noting the deficiency. "An' sure, yer anner, if Oi arn't broad enough in the chist, I make up for it by being taller for me age—Bedad, Oi'm that, sor!"

The doctor seemed tickled by this unanswerable piece of logic.

"We'll see about that, Paddy," he said. "Trimmens, measure his height!"

"Five feet five, sir," ejaculated the steward, after adjusting the sliding roll of the standard and reading the index. "That's three h'inches over the h'average, sir, for his age, I think, sir."

"Very good, that'll do; I'll pass you, Donovan," said the doctor, wheeling round his chair and facing Mick. "But, mind, you'll have to fill out, my boy."

"Faith, I will that same, sor; and thank you kindly, sor, for your goodness to a poor misfortenated gossoon:" replied the other, all full of gratitude. "Your honour won't know me, bedad, in a wake's toime if I ownly git enough praties an' mate!"

The doctor laughed outright at this; whereat, the somewhat demure sick-berth steward smiled grimly, allowing himself this slight indulgence amid the stormy austerities of duty, the only departure from the gravity he had all along displayed.

As for me, I was on the broad grin the whole period of my examination.

This lasted from the time I unbuttoned my braces till I threw them over my shoulders again, my grin expanding as I passed each test with flying colours, and broadening all over my face to

express my inward joy. For, thank God, I proved to be not only 'sound in mind and limb,' but taller and broader-chested than most lads of my age. While as for my sight—

"By Jove, Trimmens," observed the doctor, "I think he could pretty nearly see through that bulkhead and the Bill of Portland beyond! He has eyes like gimlets!"

"Yes, sir!"

With that, the sick-berth steward, hailing the ship's corporal, who had been waiting all the while at the entrance to the doctor's sanctum, handed him our papers; and the three of us were then escorted to the paymaster's office, aft there, to undergo our last ordeal.

Here, each of us had to sign a document, binding us to serve Her Majesty for a period of twelve years after we should have attained the age of eighteen.

A number was thereupon given to Reeks and Donovan, as well as myself, and these numbers entered in the ship's books against all three of our names; the one apportioned to me being 2799, which I looked upon as a happy omen, there being always luck in the odd figures.

Then, finally, one of the clerks noted down in turn the respective colours of our hair and eyes, asking also if we had any special markings on any part of our several persons; so that the authorities would be able to identify us should we 'cut and run' at any time, and try to leave the service before we worked out our allotted spell of twelve years as bluejackets "under the flag."

"Now, lads," said the corporal, as we emerged from the ship's office, as the paymaster's domain is styled, after going through all these formalities, "you're entered on the ship's books and you've signed the watch bill, and can call yourselves *Saint Vincent* boys at last!"

"Be the powers, sor," exclaimed Mick Donovan, at once executing a caper which had some remote resemblance to an Irish jig, "it's deloighted Oi am at that same! Oi fale so glad, alannah, Oi could dance for joy, loike the piper that played before Moses!"



"What d'you mean?" retorted Reeks, thinking he was taking liberties with his name. "We don't have no Irish pipers or pigs in this country!"

"Faith an' sure," retorted Mike, "that's bekase ye don't want 'em, avic. Ye've got so many pigs, me darlint, amongst ye, bedad, ov yer own, sure, an' not fur off, nayther, I'm a-thinkin'!"

Before 'Ugly' could make any reply to this sharp home-thrust, a bugle rang out loudly throughout the ship fore and aft, putting a stop to the interesting conversation.

"Look sharp, lads!" cried the corporal, hurrying us on to where we had left the master-at-arms. "There's 'cooks to their messes,' and you're just in time for dinner."

"Dinner, faith!" ejaculated Mick Donovan. "Oi'm the boy for ye, begorrah. Where shall we go, sor, for to git it? Sure, the dochter, God bless him! Towld me Oi wor to fill mesilf out; an' the sooner I sit about it, the betther, Oi'm afther thinkin'!"

"Come along with me and you'll be all right," said the corporal kindly. "You novices will mess here on the middle deck, along with us police, till you pass your bag and hammock drill and get your uniforms. You're only what they calls 'unclothed boys' at present, my lads!"

So saying, he led the way to the aftermost mess on the port side of the ship.

Its number was '52,' near at hand to the office of the ship's police, and adjoining the entry-port where we had come on board that morning, and on reaching it we were directed to seat ourselves at the table, one of the oldsters being 'told off' to look after us, and supply our wants as soon as the boatswain's pipe was heard; when some six hundred and fifty odd boys came tumbling down the hatchways from 'divisions' on the upper deck, diving below, to their dinners on the lower.

"You're in luck, my lads," said patronisingly the first-class boy, with a double stripe on his arm, who had been deputed to fetch our food, we having no cook or captain of our mess appointed yet. "Not many gits sich a chance on first j'ining!"

"Why?" asked I—"how's that?"

"It's pay-day to-day, being Thursday; and so you'll have roast mutton and gammy duff for dinner, let alone your pay, mate."

"I don't fancy any of us will get fat on our pay," said I, with a grin, in response to his chaff. "But, what's 'gammy duff'—I never heard tell of such a thing before?"

"Plum puddin', with raisins in it, stoopid," he quickly sang out, we darting off, on catching sight of our friend the ship's corporal, who just then popped his head out of the office to see how we were getting on. "I means a puddin', Johnny Green, with as many 'gammies' as the boys don't 'sneak' when the cook's working up the duff!"

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## **Chapter Four.**

### **I am "Cut down in my Prime."**

After dinner, which, by the way, my friend Mick Donovan appeared to enjoy mightily, not having had a decent meal for more than a month past, as he confessed to me afterwards, the bugle loudly sounded the 'assembly,' when all the boys below came rushing up the hatchway near us, trooping onwards by the ladder above to the upper deck. They jostled and shoved past each other, I thought, as if Old Nick were after them, none wishing to occupy the unenviable position of last man, or rather boy.

There wore eight other new boys in addition to us three, the latest of the novices, who had joined the ship that morning; and, although we all rose up from the mess-table, where we had very satisfactorily polished off our dinners in company, the lot of us hung together about the spot, not knowing what to do, or where we should go.

We were, besides, pretty well confused with all the bustle and hurry, and scurry catch-me-who-can business, going on around us.

It seemed, indeed, to bewilder even 'Ugly,' free and easy chap as he appeared to be.

Our friend the master-at-arms, however, solved the difficulty for us before we were many minutes older, as you will see.

"Ha, my lads!" said he, advancing towards us from the office with the glass windows, through which he could overhaul all that was going on on deck, and where he probably had been enjoying his own meal on the quiet; "got through your dinners, eh?"

"Yes, sir," we shouted in chorus, Mick Donovan adding a very appropriate grace, which most of us had forgotten. "Thanks be to God, yer 'anner!"

"Ah, I needn't have asked the question," said the 'Jaunty' to this, glancing meaningly at the empty plates that littered the table, not a scrap or a crumb being left by any of us. "But now, my lads, you must set to work to pay for your grub. Here, look sharp and clear up! We always have things shipshape aboard here, and the sooner you learn your duties the better."

The same first-class boy who had previously got our dinners for us from the cook's galley, and who, you may remember, had tried a 'barney' on me when he brought them, happening to be passing by at the time again, the master-at-arms hailed him.

"Where are you going, my joker?" said he. "You seem to be having a good time of it!"

"Jist goin' a message fur the bosun," stammered he. "He sent me to ax the gunner, sir, fur a copy o' the mornin' paper."

"That's a bouncer," rejoined the 'Jaunty,' who, no doubt, was up to such tricks. "Why, you're going away from the gunner's cabin and not towards it, as you very well know. You just stop here and show these new boys how to clean up the mess-table."

"Yes, sir," replied the boy very humbly; and then a grin came over his face as he looked at the empty plates, like as the master-at-arms had done previously, asking demurely, "Shall I show 'em where to chuck the scraps, sir?"

"Yes, if you can find them," answered the 'Jaunty' shortly. "It strikes me, Larrikins, you'll soon be on short allowance yourself if you don't keep a better hold on your tongue! Let me see these mess-tables all cleared up before I come back from the wardroom, or you'll smell powder before Six Bells, I promise you, and shan't go ashore to-day."

This threat had the effect of sobering down our lively friend, who then put us in the way of what we were to do; and, all of

us lending willing hands, we soon had the place as trim as it was before we had sat down to our dinners.

After this, taking the dirty plates back to the galley, we washed all of them up in a bucket of water and restored them to their proper racks, returning to the entry-port just as the master-at-arms came sauntering back along the deck from the officers' quarters aft.

"Ha, done that job all right, I see," said he in an approving tone. "Now, let me see what we can find for you, to keep your hands out of mischief. Corporal, have they told off any hands yet to clear the bilge?"

"Yes, sir," replied one of the ship's corporals who had just come up the forward hatchway from the lower deck. "I jest heered the bosun givin' orders for a gang to go down on the orlop deck."

"Then, take th's lot of new boys with you and show them the way down. They're almost enough to man the pumps all by themselves!"

"Aye, aye, sir," responded the corporal, turning to retrace his steps down the hatchway which he had just ascended. "Come along, my lads, follow me!"

Down we all trooped accordingly, on to the lower deck, where we saw a number of the boys, who had been dismissed from quarters, busy at their various instruction drills; which we, unhappy 'unclothed' ones, could not participate in till we had been clad in uniform and become part and parcel of the ship's company.

Giving these the go-by, and also passing the schoolroom, leaving that astern on our starboard hand, we descended yet lower to the orlop deck, the lowest in the ship, being just above the hold where lies the ballast, and the water-tanks are stowed, as well as spare gear.

Here, some twenty other boys, under the superintendence of one of the petty officers, were working away at the cranks of the Downton pumps with the energy of so many convicts on the treadmill; clink-clanking at such a rate, that one could hear the suck of the pumps and the rush of the water through the pipes, ending with a sort of gurgle at the end of the stroke!

In the 'dim religious light' produced by a couple of ship's lanterns hung at the head of the hatchways, widely apart, not very much could be seen of the interior, save the broad substantial deck beams and curved knees at the sides; but I noticed that the faces of two or three of the boys nearest one of these lights were streaming with perspiration, which showed that the work was "taking it out of them."

"Tail on here!" shouted out the petty officer, who seemed a rather grumpy individual, on our coming down to join the gang. "We don't want no idlers here!"

With that, Mick Donovan and I gripped the handle of one of the cranks, two others of the new boys facing us; and we soon all found our places, clink-clanking away like the rest had done before we joined in. Indeed, we couldn't stop once we had started, but had to 'sling on' whether we liked it or not, the handles of the pumps keeping up their up and down motion through the action of the others; so that if we had let go, we should have got either a tidy crack under the chin, or else been tumbled over on the deck.

After half-an-hour's experience of this exhilarating labour, the petty officer sang out, "Spell ho!" and we left off the job, the pumps having sucked dry, and the bilge being thus clear for the day.

We then returned up the two hatchways to the middle deck above, the boy messenger Larrikins being sent down by the direction of the master-at-arms to fetch us to be measured for our uniforms, the tailor having come aboard.

The 'snip' did not take long over his business; for he and his assistant, after putting their tapes round us, and punching 'Ugly,' who would stoop, to make him really stand upright, promised that we should all have our new clothes by the following Saturday.

"Hurrah!" said one of the novices near me. "I'll then be able to go home and see mother again!"

"G-a-a, cry babby!" jeered 'Ugly.' "Yer oughter 'a bin tied to yer mother's apron string!"

"Begorrah!" interposed Mick Donovan, "that's more'n ye could be afther! I doesn't think ye're afther havin' a moother at all. Faith, ye're too ugly fur inny one to own ye, save the divvle; an' he'd be a born fool fur his pains if he did."

A laugh went round amongst us, which was only quenched by the master-at-arms singing out "Silence there!" and then; the lot of us were taken by Larrikins to the ship's steward, who served out to each of us a hammock and a pair of blankets, part of the outfit to which all second-class boys are entitled on joining the Navy, when a grateful country makes them a present of six guineas to furnish themselves with a rig-out!

Mind you, though, this sum is not allowed to be spent at the sucking seaman's own discretion, but is laid out for him in a wardrobe of the most approved nautical type, suited alike to his wants and the requirements of the service.

The afternoon, through these means, passed away so quickly, that though I was once or twice near the entry-port on the starboard side, close by to which the tailor had measured us, I declare I never once thought of looking out over the waterway to see what had become of father and his wherry; albeit, from the tide having ebbed, my outlook was now much more circumscribed than when I had come afloat in the morning, it seeming but a stone's throw to Point; while on the port side of the ship one could almost have walked ashore, the mud flats of Haslar Creek being out in all their glory, and stretching up almost to the old *Saint Vincent's* rudder-post!

On account of its being Thursday, a lot of the boys were allowed ashore; and in the quiet that generally reigned, the majority of the others being occupied drilling below, the middle and upper decks were comparatively deserted, and things apparently at a standstill.

At Eight Bells, however, all this was altered, the boys scuttling about to their respective messes to supper, or what we call 'tea' time ashore.

This meal was as fairly nourishing as the dinner that was served out, each boy having ten ounces of bread, an ounce of sugar, and one-eighth of an ounce of tea, to his own cheek.

Tea, you must know, is styled 'plew' on board, in the slang of the training-ship; possibly, through some association with the 'sky blue' known in the boarding-schools of shore folk.

Larrikins was put by the master-at-arms to 'show us the ropes' in getting our supplies from the galley for this supper, as previously; and amused himself considerably at our expense, chaffing some of the new chaps about their not having "smelt such a thing as tea before," so he hinted.

"I s'pose now," he said to Mick Donovan, whose queer description of himself had already got wind through the ship. I'm afraid from the corporal who took us to the sick-bay having 'split' upon him, "in your country you'd eat them tea leaves, instead o' wettin' on 'em, stooed in ile, same as the I-talians cook everything I'm told, hey?"

"Faith, if I had ye in the ould counthry," answered back Mick, not for a moment nonplussed, "I'd soon show ye how an Oitalian of the raal sort, loike me fayther, sor, lives! Bedad, it's praties an' crame we hev fur tay, sure, ivvery day in the wake!"

This created a good deal of noisy merriment as we sat round the mess-table near the entry-port, causing the sharp-eared, lynx-eyed 'Jaunty' to spot the offender from his convenient post of observation hard by.

"Be quiet there, Paddy!" he sang out, poking his head above the window-sill. "Do you think you're in your own mud cabin in the wilds of Connemara? As for you, Larrikins, I have warned you before, and you had better keep your weather eye open, my joker!"

We were all as quiet as lambs in an instant, not a sound being heard above the clatter of the cups and saucers, and the gulps made by 'Ugly' in swallowing his tea, that individual being as piggish in his habits as he was in his appearance; and, presently, this clatter was increased by our collecting the mess-traps after finishing our meal, when the same process of cleaning up was effected as before, everything being left as tidy in and around the vicinity of Mess Number 52 as we had found it when first installed there.

From Six to Eight Bells, in the second dog-watch, the boys, I found, were allowed to skylark about the upper deck and aloft, playing 'follow my leader' up and down the rigging, without any interference or interruption from the officers and instructors, save when it seemed to them the larking might degenerate into horseplay.

Then, it was put a slop to, so far as the particular incident was concerned, in a twinkle.

Not being in uniform, I kept aloof from these mad pranks, sticking close to Mick Donovan, who I saw was ashamed of his ragged clothes, being afraid of the boys jeering him, like Larrikins.

That worthy soon picked us out, though; aye, in spite of our sheltering under the lee of the bridge, and being almost concealed in the evening gloom.

"S'pose yer afeerd o' clim'in' riggin'?"

"Divvle a bit!" replied Mick in a moment. "Oi'd cloimb in a jiffey; ounly the jintleman downstairs, faith, tould us all we wasn't."

This allusion to the 'Jaunty' silenced the incorrigible Larrikins for the nonce; though he sniggered at Mick saying 'downstairs' instead of below, as most landsmen do when new to board-ship life.

The next moment, however, Master Larrikins was at it again, trying to 'take a rise out of me,' Mick having thus discouraged his advances in that direction.

"You'll be havin' orful times when yer goes aloft," he said, in a sort of awesome tone meant to frighten me. "I've bin up theer on the main crosstrees when yer jist couldn't 'old yer 'air on yer 'ead, let alone 'oldin' on with one 'and fur yerself and t'other for the Navy."

"Stow that," said I, laughing in his face. "Why, I've been up to the main truck of a line-o'-battle ship before to-day and am not afraid of climbing! I'm not strange to the sea, my smart chap, let me tell you. My father, though he's a waterman now, is an old sailor, and has taught me pretty well all he learnt."

"Aye, aye, that's right enuff; but 'earin of it an' a-seein' it's two different things. You jist wait till yer gets to sea and ain't a-plying bark'ards and forruds in Porchmouth 'arbour. My stars, won't yer be flummuxed then."

"Don't you believe it," I retorted. "I've been to sea, I tell you, before to-day."

"Oh aye, that's right enuff; but there's goin' to sea, an' goin' to sea. Lor! Yer 'aven't ever bin out in the *Martin* brig, have yer, now?"

"No, of course not," I replied. "I've only just joined the service, I tell you."

"Ah, you jist wait then," said he, taking this observation of mine for a fresh lead. "I wer' out once, I tells yer, in the brig when the sea wos mountings 'igh, an' the wind—Lor! Yer shood 'a



'errd it blow! It took the mizzen to's'le right clean out of 'er; an' there was four on us at the wheel, ay, 'sides old Jellybelly."

"Why," I exclaimed, "who is he?"

"The quarter-master, in course," rejoined Larrikins indignantly. "Where was yer raised not fur to know that afore? He allers goes by that name aboard ship, as everybody knows."

He was proceeding to tell me some thrilling and highly adventurous experiences he had had in the Channel and off the Isle of Wight, out on the autumn cruise in the training-brig, when the bugle sounded, and the boys all mustered at quarters before turning in for the night.

Staying on the upper deck for a time, Mick Donovan and I witnessed the mad race which presently took place on the order being given to sling hammocks; each boy scurrying to the nettings and hurrying below, hammock under arm, to rig up the same in the billet allotted to him on the lower deck.

Ere long, the idea struck both Mick and myself, almost simultaneously, that it was high time for us to think of our sleeping accommodation for the night; and so, we hurried down at the tail end of the crowd of other fellows, to seek the aid of our old friend the master-at-arms, the 'Deus ex machina' of our hopes and fears.

Our new hammocks had been left in the police office of the ship under his immediate eye; so, on ascertaining the doubt that harassed our minds anent the night-lodging question, the 'Jaunty,' as heretofore, solved the difficulty at once by saying that we were to sling our hammocks on the middle deck, adjacent to the mess-place where we had dined and supped so sumptuously. Just then, as luck would have it, Larrikins, our old cicerone, came up abreast of where we were standing.

"Hi there!" sang out the master-at-arms. "Come and show these boys how to sling their hammocks."

"Yes, sir," replied Larrikins, with a scrape and a touch of his cap. "Werry good, sir."

So saying, he set about knotting the lanyard of Irish Mick's hammock; and, after slinging it from the hooks in the deck beams, over the mess-table where the famished lad had enjoyed such a rare 'tuck out' that day, Larrikins went on to explain how the blankets should be 'tucked in' to the frail

structure and wrapped round the occupant, so as to prevent him from tumbling out, which Larrikins declared, almost with tears in his eyes, he should deeply regret were such a catastrophe to occur.

"Lor'," he asseverated, "I'd never forgive myself—strike me silly if I would!"

"Faith an' sure, is it ai'ther expectin' me now for to schlape in that thare outlandish consarn yez are?" exclaimed Mick, to whom a hammock was an entire novelty. "It's jokin', faith, ye are entirely, sure!"

However, after, like 'vaulting ambition,' overleaping himself when trying to jump into his unaccustomed bed-place, falling, equally unceremoniously, 'on t'other side,' Mick succeeded in ensconcing himself very comfortably in his hammock.

Now came my turn, my friend Larrikins being even more obsequious in his aid to me than to Mick.

The result amply justified his solicitude, for, although I managed to jump in all right, and even to go to sleep presently soundly enough, wearied out with all the excitement of the day, I was in the midst of a terrible dream, in which I thought I was at sea in the *Martin* brig, in a fearful tempest, with the waters overwhelming us, and the vessel on the point of foundering, when I was awakened by a crash that seemed to resound through the ship, and then I'm sure I saw more stars than were ever seen by mortal in the bright blue firmament of heaven!

I had been 'cut down,' as the nautical phrase goes.

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## **Chapter Five.**

### **Boxing the Compass.**

Sudden as had been my downfall, I was sufficiently awake, after the first momentary giddiness caused by the sharp crack with which my head came against the deck had passed away, to have a shrewd idea as to who had brought about my sad calamity; the giggling and whispering, that went on around, in the semi-darkness, telling me, had I needed any such assurance, that my fall was due to no accident.

"Hullo, my joker!" I sang out, recognising the voice of Larrikins as I fumbled about amongst the blankets and loose hammock cloth, feeling very much as if I were tightly tied up in a sack, part of the lanyard having taken a round turn round my neck. "I say, you first-class boy, there! You with the mug on you like a vegetable marrow! Wait till to-morrow morning and I'll serve you out for this—see if I don't!"

"Lor', yer doesn't mean fur to say as how ye've gone a downer?" cried my tormentor, in a tone of great commiseration, lending a hand to extricate me from the folds of the blankets. "I never seed a chap go down so suddink. Lor'! Yer must hev made a slippery hitch when yer fastened up the end on yer lanyard to the hook. Lor', I am that orful sorry!"

"Oh yes," said I, shaking myself free from the last of my encumbrances and standing up erect, "you can just tell that to the marines!"

I was not, however, at all out of temper, having learnt long since from my father, even were I not fond of a bit of practical-joking myself, not to take umbrage at the skylarking of any of my comrades on board ship where no malice was really intended. As he told me, the more a fellow shows he's 'riled,' the more his shipmates ever will tease him.

"If you want to have a happy life at sea, Tom," said he, "you must always bear everything good-humouredly—everything; aye, should you tumble from aloft and risk losing the number of your mess into the bargain!"

Hearing the row and the sound of our talking after 'lights out!' had been called, one of the ship's corporals came up with a lantern to see what was the matter; and he at once spotted Master Larrikins.

"Hi, young feller!" said he to that arch-conspirator; "what are you doing here? How's it you haven't turned in on the lower deck, in your proper billet?"

"The master-at-arms told me, sir, as how I wer fur to see as these novices was slung their hammicks propingly," replied Larrikins glibly. "An' I wer jist a-seein' to do it, sir."

"Aye, and a precious fine way you have done it, too!" rejoined the ship's corporal, whose face I could clearly see by the light of his own lantern had a broad and beaming grin on it, as he proceeded to inspect the lashings now of my hammock, the

foot-end of which was still attached to its hook in the deck beam. "Why, you've been and actively gone and triced the poor beggar up with a bit of spunyarn. No wonder he come down all standing on his cocoanut!"

The other fellows near me had wakened up by this, and there was a good snigger all round; until the ship's corporal, having rigged up my hammock again in the way it should have been rightly done at first, with a double turn of the lanyard round the hook, shoved me in and kindly tucked my blankets round me, before going off to complete his rounds; telling us, as he disappeared forwards in the darkness, that if we did not "keep quiet for the rest of the night we'd each get 'four dozen' on the quarter-deck next day, besides being spread-eagled in the weather rigging as a caution to all novices about to join the ship!"

This warning, uttered in a deep, sepulchral voice, no doubt awed most of the new boys, but it only made me laugh to myself, as I was pretty well up to such 'barney'; and, with little dread of any penalties in store—though for that matter there was not much that could be said against me, for I certainly had not tried the strength or the softness of the ship's planks of my own free-will—I cuddled into my hammock and went to sleep as soundly as if I were in my own old bed at home, in spite of the snoring and choking noises made in his dreams by that ugly chap Moses Reeks, who occupied the next hammock to mine.

"Whe-e-e-e-e! Who-e-o-e-o! Whe-eep!"

So the boatswain's whistle rang out through the ship with a shrill iteration that pierced my ears in the fresh and chilly air next morning, awaking me, if possible, in even yet more startling fashion than Larrikins' successful trick of the previous evening.

"Whee-e-ah! Whee-e-ah!"

There it was again; and, should this not be sufficient to disturb the slumbers of heavy sleepers, the sharp boatswain's pipe was supplemented by the hoarse shouts of his 'mates' up and down the hatchways far and near, a very legion of voices!

"Rouse out! Rouse out! Rouse out! Show a leg."

I really thought the nor'-east wind had brought up a great haul with the flood-tide, and that innumerable costers were calling out some strange fish in the streets round Bonfire Corner; while

our white cockatoo, 'Ally Sloper,' was having a bit of fun with himself and mother by imitating the cry!

Presently, though, a rough shake of my hammock and the hail of one of the boatswain's mates close by me told a different tale.

"Here, out of this, my lad!" said he, giving a twist to the swinging concern that landed me on the deck in a twinkling. "You can't stop there snoozing any longer! Don't you see the sun is scorching your eyes out?"

He had a good deal of imagination, had that man; for it would have puzzled the 'Philadelphia lawyer,' whom father was so fond of quoting, to have discovered the ghost of a ray of sunlight this cold, foggy, February morning at Four Bells!

The rest of the novices—there being, as you know, ten other 'unclothed' boys besides myself—had been roughly aroused in like fashion; and to a by-stander all of us must have looked a forlorn lot of shivering creatures, adrift there on the cheerless deck in the half light of early day, not knowing what to do with ourselves until somebody told us what to do and bearing, I fancy, a strikingly strong resemblance to a flock of lambs in some strange pasture deserted by their dams!

I make a mistake there, however, for the muttered growling exclamations I heard uttered by one of the warrant-officers, who came past where we stood clustered together, certainly sounded uncommonly like the name of the lambs' mothers I have just mentioned, showing that its 'eidolon' remained.

The observation made by this officer, who, to my surprise, I subsequently found was the boatswain, brought our old police friend, the master-at-arms, on the scene.

"Here, boys," said he to us, "you must bestir yourselves, and not stand star-gazing there, like so many country bumpkins at a fair! Tom Bowling, if you're the son of your father, you ought to know that you've got to unsling your hammock when the 'lash up and stow' is sounded! And you, too, my Irish-Italian friend over there, roll up your hammock, my lad!"

"Sure, an' is it manin' me yez afther?" inquired Mick Donovan, unhitching the lanyard of his hammock from the hook above in a brace of shakes. "Faith, it's makin' a rowly-powly puddin' of it I will, sor, entirely!"

The 'Jaunty' grinned at Mick's naïve remark, but soon mastered the difficulty of teaching us by passing the job on to other hands.

"Ah, perhaps you'd better 'go through the ropes,' my lads, properly, and begin at once at your 'bag and hammock drill,' as all new boys should; though sometimes, they wait till they get uniforms first," said he, hailing, as he spoke, one of the first-class boys standing by the police office, detailed to act as messengers, like our friend Larrikins. "Boy, there! See if you can find one of the instructors handy, and tell him, with my compliments, I should like to see him for a minute!"

"Yes, sir," replied this chap, saluting. "I seed Mister Saunders by the fore-hatchway jist now."

"He'll do," said the master-at-arms. "Carry on, my lad. Look sharp!"

The next instant, back came the boy with one of the instructors in his wake, a stalwart seaman, dressed in the usual bluejacket rig, with a petty officer's badge.

"These boys here, Mr Saunders," said the master-at-arms, pointing us out with a collective sweep of his long brawny arm, "are all novices, who came aboard yesterday, and don't know what to do with themselves till they join the ship's company. Hadn't they better pass their 'bag and hammock' while waiting for their rig, instead of loafing about here? Mr Gadgett, the bo'sun, was complaining just now of their taking up all the fairway of the deck, and told me I must get rid of them from here somehow or the other!"

"All right," responded the seaman-instructor to this suggestion of the master-at-arms; and, turning to us, he said, "Take up your hammocks, my lads, and follow me down to the lower deck. You'll have a practical lesson in seeing how your shipmates do it, lads. We're just in time!"

We were, barely so; for, as we passed down the hatchway from the middle deck to the lower region he had previously indicated, it was hard work for us to shove by the surging crowd of boys who were hurrying up, each with his hammock neatly made up and lashed in the regulation form, to be stowed in the nettings on top of the bulwarks amidships the upper deck, according to nautical routine.

Some, however, were slower at the work, and, taking stock of these, in obedience to the instructor's orders, I got a very fair notion of how the thing was done; the more especially, as father had shown me the way he used to lash up his hammock in the old days when he was at sea, by the aid of a biscuit bag and a piece of string.

But our instructor was not satisfied by our now having mere ocular demonstration and doing nothing further; not he. On the contrary, he took us up to make another requisition on the ship's steward for our regular kit, which was promptly served out to us; and all the morning, after a good breakfast, which made Mick Donovan open his eyes wider than ordinarily and stare like a stockfish, consisting as it did of cold salt pork and bread, with some splendid hot cocoa, that was more like chocolate, and such as he had never tasted before, we were kept hard at it till the 'assembly' was bugled out before dinner—going through the details of 'bag and hammock drill' seriatim, from the initiatory stage of plaiting the ends of the 'nettles' to lashing it up with the specified number of turns.

We new boys returned to Number 52 Mess on the middle deck for dinner, when 'cooks to their messes' was sounded.

Our meal this day, it being a Friday, was of a different kind, though quite as substantial as we had experienced on the previous day; a well-piled plate of beef and potatoes being allotted to each of us by the presiding genius of the galley, the sight of which viands made our mouths water.

"Lor', it ain't much to holler about!" exclaimed the fastidious Larrikins, on Mick rubbing his hands at seeing those appetising viands; while 'Ugly' cried out joyously, on noticing his mealy mass of potatoes, "Them's the raal jockeys fur I," thus paraphrasing the remark of a once celebrated millionaire possessed of much lucre but boasting of little conversational power, when at a state banquet, "Why, we only calls this aboard 'two spuds and a Jonah!'"

"I can see the 'spuds' all right," said I; "but where's the Jonah?"

"That be the bone, silly!"

With which withering rejoinder, Larrikins left us to enjoy ourselves with the food he contemned; though he probably went away to make a hearty dinner off the same at his own mess on the deck below, where his division "hung out."

Nothing further of any note occurred during the afternoon to mar the harmony or vary the monotony of our 'bag and hammock drill,' at which we were religiously kept up to the time to leave off work; when we enjoyed again our tea-supper, and skylarked afterwards till it was time to 'turn in,' which we managed to do now more comfortably as well as expeditiously than on the night before; while, I may add, my dreams happily were not disturbed by any storms and thunder-claps of that imp Larrikins' contrivance.

The next day, Saturday, it was a case of 'wash and scrub decks,' and wash and scrub everything, I think, from early morning till dewy eve.

A very 'dewy' eve it was, too, if dampness made it so; but if one did feel wet and miserable, as I confess I was, the remembrance it brought back to my mind of my mother's house-cleaning at home being almost too vivid to be pleasant, still, everybody on board had the satisfaction of knowing that the ship was as smart as holystone and sand could make her, from upper deck to keelson, I verily believe!

I was none the less miserable, either, the following morning, when all the boys were rigged out in their best and inspected by the captain; for the tailor, true to the character of all 'snips' since the days when Adam started in that line with his fig-leaf costume, never sent on board, as he promised, the uniforms of us unfortunate novices, so we could neither make a decent appearance with the rest of our comrades, nor have permission to go ashore—'unclothed' scarecrows, as some of us were, would have seemed queer fish to come from a well-ordered ship.

On Monday, however, all things were made right in this respect; and, having satisfactorily passed 'bag and hammock drill,' the test of our novitiate, I and my fellow-unfortunates became not only clad like our fellows, but were enrolled amongst the rest of the second-class boys, and appointed to our proper place in the ship.

My number being 2799, through some occult system of nautical numeration, I was detailed to the 'Third,' or second starboard, division of the ship's company; so I joined mess Number 38, which was on the port side on the lower deck, the first one aft of the schoolroom.

I also proceeded a day or two after, being thenceforth regarded as a neophyte no longer, to take part in all the regular drills of



the ship, and one morning, subsequent to breakfast, underwent that rudimentary stage of seamanship styled 'boxing the compass'—though I might have really told the painstaking instructor, who painfully and ploddingly laboured to instil the cardinal points into my head as if I were an ignoramus, that I not only knew the 'lubber's point' probably as well as he did, but could, on a pinch, have conned the ship in and out of Portsmouth Harbour!

This 'boxing the compass' business, though, brought me to loggerheads with that brute 'Ugly' somehow or other, strangely enough.

I don't know how it was, but from the moment, I believe, I first cast eyes on his singularly unprepossessing face, Moses Reeks had been my special antipathy!

It was not so much that he said anything to me or of me, as from the fact of his always 'putting it on' poor Mick Donovan, for whom I entertained as great a liking as I disliked the other.

'Ugly' was always snarling at my chum, and ever giving him a chance kick or blow, should he be able to do so unobserved and without being directly taxed with it; though, of course, he would deny it if observed by any of the other boys, being an unmitigated liar, in addition to having a sour and vindictive disposition.

That very morning I noticed him deliberately stamp on poor Mick's bare toes with all the weight of his big heavy foot, as we were coming down the hatchway from early 'divisions'; and when I spoke to him about it he said coldly he "hadn't done nuthin' of the sort!"

I knew this was an untruth; but I bided my time, judiciously watching for an opportunity to pay him out.

This came sooner than I expected; for during our compass lesson I managed to get him into a fog about the points which the instructor was explaining, drawing down on my joker the wrath and outspoken opprobrium of that officer.

'Ugly' noted this, and in his turn bided his time.

The watch was dismissed, and the 'stand by' had been bugled before quarters, preparatory to our being dispersed for dinner; when 'Ugly' nudged me as we passed up the hatchway together,

coming much closer to me than I liked, the very touch of the unclean brute being obnoxious to me.

"Wot d'yer mean by comin' the barney over me and a-makin' that codger of a kinstructor bullyrag me afore all the t'other chaps fur?"

"What do you mean, Reeks?" said I, in reply to this, returning his nudge with a good dig from the bony knob of my elbow in his ribs, and knocking the wind pretty well-nigh out of him. "You jumped on poor Mick Donovan's bare foot this morning, and now you try to shove me!"

"Oh!" he exclaimed, as we emerged on the upper deck, where our division had by now already partly assembled on the starboard side, forward; "that be it, mister?"

"Yes," said I, as I slipped into my place near Mick, "that's it!"

After 'divisions,' when the other boys were rushing down below to their messes to dinner, the bugle-call for which was braying out its cheerful sounds, I stopped behind on the upper deck, as did "Ugly."

"Sure an' what are ye stoppin' fur, Tom, mabouchal?" said Mick to me in surprise. "Begorrah, I can smell the mate alriddy, an', faith, the praties, too! I can say their smilin' faces bickonin' to me an' sayin', 'Coom an' ate me!'"

"I'm not coming yet," I replied, in a more serious tone than Mick evidently expected. "I've got some business with this chap here."

'Ugly' overheard me, as I intended he should.

"Hay," said he, "did yer speak to Oi?"

"Hay is meant for horses and asses," I answered drily, with a grin; "and if you be one of them latter, as I think, and so does Mick here I know, why, I did refer to you!"

"Want ter fight?"

"Yes," I said, launching out my fist straight towards his bullet head and giving him a cropper on the mouth that sent him tumbling backwards on the deck, all of a heap; "I do."

'Ugly' rose slowly to his feet, his face streaming with blood; and he was just about making a rush at me like a mad bull at a gate, while I put myself in a posture of defence in proper pugilistic fashion, when an interruption, though but of a temporary character, came to these proceedings.

The ubiquitous Larrikins was the intervener.

"Lor', you be green 'uns!" he cried, sinking his voice to a cautious pitch. "Don't you fight here; why, the 'crushers' will nab yer afore yer can strike a blow comfortably! If fight yer must, coom up here on the fo'c's'le, and then you can fight away theer to yer 'art's content, without nobody not a-hinterfeerin' with yer!"

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## **Chapter Six.**

### **A Knotty Point!**

I led the way towards the forecastle of the old ship, where the high bulwarks, I saw, would screen us well from observation; although the place, of course, was on the open deck, and visible from aloft, had anybody been there on the look-out, anxious to take a peep at us.

In the old days, indeed, had this rencontre between 'Ugly' and me then took place, we might have fought in an enclosed arena; for the *Saint Vincent*, I have been told, when she was first built, was fitted with a poop and topgallant-forecastle, and went to sea with them, but Admiral Sir Charles Napier, who was then commodore of the Channel Squadron, and hoisted his broad pennant in her, found the ship so top-heavy when under his command that he reported her to be unseaworthy on his return to Spithead with the fleet, the result of which was that she lost her poop and topgallant-forecastle; hence 'Ugly' and I had now to fight under the eye of the circling seagulls, always on the wing, screeching round the old training-ship in their plaintive fashion, and diving ever and anon into the tideway to pick up scraps that were chucked overboard by our comrades, more sensible than us, down below at their dinners!

The deck was quite clear, the only person visible being the captain of the afterguard, who was taking a snooze on a pile of canvas and old sails that were stowed in a heap close by the main bitts; so, acting under the chaperonage of Larrikins, who

officiated as bottle-holder, 'Ugly' and I stood up, facing each other with our fists doubled, ready for action, in a nice little open space that seemed to have been left especially for the purpose between the heel of the bowsprit and the knight-heads.

One of the other first-class boys had stopped up to see the fun in addition to Larrikins, and he now offered himself as second to 'Ugly,' while Mick, of course, he being really the main cause of the quarrel, naturally came forward as mine.

"Now, gents," cried Larrikins, seeing my antagonist and myself were duly prepared, "yer can bergin the puffomince as soon as yer likes!"

Before waiting even for this mandate, 'Ugly' made that mad-bull rush at me which he had contemplated in the first instance at the commencement of hostilities; but having had some considerable previous experience in the use of those weapons of attack and defence alike, with which a beneficent nature has so thoughtfully provided menfolk, from many a rough and tumble fight on Common Hard with the mudlarks and other idle scamps frequenting that place, who used to be always playing pranks with father's wherry, trying to steal anything they could lay hold of, should we leave her for a minute alone, I had no difficulty in avoiding the onslaught of my opponent.

I kept my right hand well up on guard, across my chest; and, my left fist being extended, I caught my gentleman a pretty tidy blow under the chin that floored him as quickly as before.

"Bedad, Tom, ye had him there!" cried Mick, dancing round me in ecstasy, while 'Ugly's' second was picking him up. "Jist giv' him a onener in his bread-basket, me jewel, an' ye'll finish him!"

This was not so easy a matter, however, as my chum supposed; Moses Reeks being of that bulldog nature, as his looks testified, that would not give in until thoroughly licked.

"Steady there," cautioned his second, trying his best to prevent him from continuing his foolish mode of plunging attack; but the pig-headed chap would persist in continually rushing in on my guard, and getting knocked down as regularly, time after time, without his having a chance of landing a blow at me, his fists ever whirling about aimlessly, and being easily avoided by myself. "Keep yer bloomin' dukes out straight in front of yer, silly! 'It 'im in the heye, I tell yer! Wy, yer lettin' 'im 'ave hit hall 'is own way!"

"Blatheration!" cried Mick, my champion, quite as energetically, in counter encouragement to me. "Go for him, Tom; go straight for him agin! Faith, me jewel, you'll lave him soon so as how his blessed own mother, bad cess to her, wouldn't know him, sure as me name now's Mick Donovan!"

Urged on in this fashion on either side, we went at it hammer and tongs, 'Ugly' getting more cautious from his repeated familiarity with the deck planking, and fighting more scientifically after the first two or three rounds.

The consequence of this was that he got in one or two nasty blows with his sledge-hammer fists on the side of my head, which made my ears ache, besides giving me a fine black eye on the port side.

He could not manage to land me a facer, however, straight out, try all that he could; and presently, on my feeling particularly 'riled' by a backhanded clout he succeeded in landing on my cheek, I drew out my left, and, driving it home forwards with all my strength, let him have it straight on the nose.

"Faith, ye tapped his claret for him that time, mabouchal; it's stramin' out all over the dick."

Hardly had my chum made this observation, so highly expressive of his unconcealed delight, ere 'Ugly,' wiping away the blood from his face with the sleeve of his jumper, and clutching hold of the lanyard round his neck, to the end of which his knife was attached, made a spring at me from the knee of his second, where he had sat dazed for half a moment, giving vent to a cry that was more like the howl of a wild animal than anything else.

I put up my hands mechanically, though I had hardly then imagined he would have come so soon at me again; intending, however, more to guard his attack than hit him any blow, for I really thought he had received quite enough punishment already.

But he beat down my guard as easily as if my arms really had been made of pipeclay, and then I felt a stinging sensation through one of these and my left side, just as if I had run foul of a jelly-fish when swimming off the 'Hot Walls,' as I have done sometimes when bathing.

"Begorrah, the thafe's stabbed ye!" exclaimed Mick, putting his arms round me as I fell back. "Whare now is ye hoort, Tom, alannah?"

"Oh, it's nothing," I said with a laugh, as soon as I got back my breath, which had been knocked out of me by the rush 'Ugly' made, the knife having only grazed my ribs, while it had given an ugly gash to my arm; though, probably, had I not guarded the blow, the sharp weapon with which my antagonist had only been supplied, like the rest of us, that very morning, would as likely as not have 'settled my hash,' as father used to say. "Pray don't make a fuss of it, Mick, or any of you fellows. It will all rub off when it's dry!"

Larrikins and the other first-class boy had meanwhile collared 'Ugly' and taken the knife from him, to prevent his doing any further mischief with it; and, as fighting was prohibited on board, and they might possibly have been brought up on the quarter-deck as accomplices, should the affair get wind and come to the notice of the ship's police, the two, who no doubt were old and tried hands at the game, thought it best to take my advice and 'keep the matter dark,' as they said.

"I doesn't like that yere knifin', though," said Master Larrikins, when Mick had bound up my arm with his handkerchief, taking it off his neck for the purpose; and we had all turned to sneak below out of observation before 'quarters' should be sounded and the fellows come tumbling up from dinner, 'Ugly' concealing his battered face by dragging down his cap over his eyes, and pulling up his collar as if he had toothache, which no doubt was not very far from the truth. "Don't yer try on that yere bloomin' game agin, you Reeks, I tell yer, my joker, or else yer 'ad better git yer coffin ready afore yer comes aboard this ship. Lor'! W'y, if the 'Jaunty' or 'Jimmy the One' knowed it, yer'd be strung up at the yard-arm this very minnit!"

The incident, however, passed off without notice from the authorities; although the news of our encounter, with its almost tragic finale, got about amongst the boys, most of the well-conducted of whom gave 'Ugly' a wide berth in consequence, the poor beggar being shunned thenceforth by all but the ne'er-do-wells of the ship, that is, until the circumstance became gradually buried in the past through the pressure of more prominent events.

We managed, combatants and seconds alike, not forgetting the director-in-chief of the fight, Master Larrikins, to reach the

sanctuary of the lower deck unseen by any of the ship's corporals, or 'crushers,' as Larrikins facetiously called them.

Not only this; through that wily individual's artful manoeuvring and pathetic appeal to the gods of the cook's galley, we also contrived to get some dinner, which, indeed, was particularly grateful to all of us after our exertions.

The meal this day, being a Wednesday, consisted, for a change, of salt pork and pea-soup; 'pea doo and bolliky,' as it is styled in *Saint Vincent* slang.

"Faith, it smells good," exclaimed Mick, with a loud and prolonged sniff of enjoyment, on the friendly Larrikins anon placing a bowl of the steaming compound under his nose on the mess-table. "A'most as good as tay, begorra!"

"Ga-a!" cried our caterer. "Only a Paddy wud say that!"

"Bedad, I don't say much differ," said Mick, after quickly gulping down the contents of his bowl with great gusto and much apparent inward satisfaction. "Pay-soup an' tay soup—sure, they bees as loike as two pays!" This certainly seemed a very logical deduction; but, before we could argue the point out, or indeed laugh at Mick's Irish way of putting it, the bugle sounded again for 'divisions.'

As we all scrambled up the after-hatch, the ship's corporal, Brown, who had helped me to sling my hammock again after I had been cut down the first night I was on board, a very decent man altogether, stopped 'Ugly,' who was on his way up ahead of me.

"Hallo!" he said. "What's the matter with your face, boy?"

"I dunno," replied my late antagonist, trying vainly to hide the effects of my fists with the sleeve of his blue jumper. "S'pose I run agin summat a-comin' downstairs jest now!"

The sun, though, streaming down through the open hatchway, handicapped all the yokel's attempts of concealment; and Mr Brown looked at him with a quizzical expression on his face and a comical twinkle in his eye that spoke a volume without words!

"It strikes me, young man," he said, with his broad good-humoured grin, "that theer 'summat' you knocked against must have been moving round you pretty smart! Bless me, if it ain't

fetched you one on your booby hatch and another on the conk, and bottled up your peepers as well! What's your name, boy?"

"Mo—ses," drawled out 'Ugly' slowly, the poor beggar having a difficulty in speaking, caused by the blow I first gave him on the mouth, which accentuated his provincial pronunciation, "Re—eeks, zur."

"Oh!" ejaculated ship's corporal Brown. "Then, Mr Moses Reeks, you'd better go to the sick-bay and see the doctor."

'Ugly' backed down the hatchway to comply with this order, as we were just then ascending from the middle deck; and, from his withdrawing his intervening figure, I became disclosed to view.

My arm, which had swollen up, and necessitated my putting it in a sling, at once attracted the observation of the corporal.

"I say, youngster," he said, arresting my footsteps in like fashion, "why are you bandaged up? What the—ah, what does this hanky-panky mean?"

"I—I—I," I stammered, not knowing what to reply to this, as I did not like to tell him a barefaced lie in cold blood offhand—"I've hurt my arm, sir."

"A—ah!" breathed out Mr Brown significantly; adding, after a pause, "You're Tom Bowling, ain't you?"

"Yes, sir," I said; "that's my name."

"Well, it strikes me, Thomas Bowling," said he drily, in the chaffy sort of way he adopted sometimes when hauling any of us 'over the coals' for some offence, performing his duty ever of guardian of the peace as lightly as he could make it, "there's some sort o' circumbendibus between this here arm of yours and the spoilt face of that there joker I've jist sent to the sick-bay. Thomas Bowling, Esquire, I fancy you'd better foller him there, my boy."

Of course, I obeyed this command, a ship corporal's word, whether jocular or not, being as good as an order and regarded as law on board the training-ship.

Nothing was said, though, to either of us regarding our recent fight, nor any embarrassing questions asked, when we reached the sick-bay. Trimmens, the sick-berth steward, on the



contrary, never moved a muscle of his mahogany face when 'Ugly' said that he had knocked his head against the hatchway, and I told a 'banger' by volunteering the statement that I had broken a plate on the mess-table, and one of the pieces had run into my arm. The wound in my side, which was really only a scratch, I never mentioned to any one, not even to Mick, who thought, and to this day knows nothing to the contrary, I believe, that I had guarded off 'Ugly's' thrust, and had been only stabbed in the arm.

Our injuries not being sufficiently serious to put either of us in the sick-list, 'Ugly' and I were sent back, after being lotioned and 'dressed' by Trimmens, to rejoin our division, then at their 'instruction drill' on the lower deck, and engaged making what are known to those learned in the arts of the sea as 'bends and hitches.'

To explain these properly to a landsman, I would say, for the sake of easier comprehension, that the theory of a 'bend' is based on the good-natured truism contained in the old adage, 'One good turn deserves another'; while a second proverb, 'Safe bind, safe find,' will equally justify the existence of the 'hitch'; but if the inquirer be not satisfied with either of these definitions or explanations, whichever term he may choose to apply to them, I can only advise him to follow Captain Cuttle's injunction and 'overhaul his Church catechism.'

To drop joking, all of us new hands were taught our work as well as sailors could teach us, which was so effectually done that what we once learnt we never forgot; this work being to treat ropes and rigging as if they were reasoning and responsible beings, and to be capable of making fast or letting loose, whensoever it so pleased us, anything under the sun, from knotting a reef point to parbuckling a cask—a dodge by which, I believe, Admiral Rodney, or Abercromby, or some other hero, during the times of the wars, contrived to drag one of his ship's guns to the top of a lofty mountain guarding the entrance to Castries, the harbour of Saint Lucia, which was by this means captured from its French possessors, and is now numbered with the rest of our West Indian colonies.

This, however, is a 'knotty' point.

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## Chapter Seven.

## **I 'Go Aloft,' like my Ancestor!**

"Tom," said Mick to me, on my telling him this, when we were dismissed anon from instruction drill and were going up on the upper deck during the 'break-off,' for a brief breath of fresh air before proceeding below again to our tea, "wer that theer yarn thrue, sure, ye wos afther tellin' me?"

He spoke earnestly, and I replied to him in the same tone. "It's true enough, Mick, that one of our officers did manage to parbuckle a gun up to the top of a high rock, or, rather, mountain, which commanded the land defences of Castries, the principal town of Saint Lucia in the West Indies! I've heard father speak about it many a time," said I. "But, 'pon my word, Mick, I can't precisely recollect if it was the gallant Rodney or Sir Ralph Abercromby; for both of 'em were busy in those parts at the time, and pretty well made their mark too! All I can say is, though, that through this dodge they took the Frenchies unawares and gave them a dressing as British sailors have always done when we've been at loggerheads with them furrin chaps!"

Mick Donovan scratched his head, in the same solemn way father used to do, as if trying to rub in this valuable piece of historical information.

"Faith," said he, "I can't underconstubble it at all, at all!"

There our conversation came to an abrupt close; the bugle summoning us to supper, and Mick being extremely particular, I found, never to be late at meal-times if he could possibly help it!

The next morning, after the usual routine of lashing up and stowing our hammocks in the nettings, on the completion of our breakfast, it was the turn of the second division of the starboard watch, to which we belonged, as I have already detailed, to go to school in the big room on the lower deck aft, where we had passed our original initiatory examination before signing our papers.

The boys were given very fair play in respect of their nautical education, taking each department of their instruction turn and turn about in regular order.

For instance, if the port watch attended school from Three Bells to Seven Bells in the forenoon—that is, in shore time, from half-

past nine to half-past eleven o'clock in the morning—the starboard watch would be engaged in seamanship or gunnery instruction; while, in the afternoon their respective avocations would be reversed, the 'starboardlines' going to their books, and the port watch occupying themselves with the other drills.

This day, as I have said, we went to school after inspection and prayers by the chaplain on the upper deck, which, I should have mentioned, was the usual routine every morning when breakfast was finished and the mess-tables and decks below swept clean and made tidy.

I remember one of the schoolmasters impressed me very much during a geography lesson, by showing us on the globe how extensive our national possessions were, and how it became us as British sailors to maintain our rights on every land and sea where the Union Jack of Old England had ever once floated.

I declare I can recollect his very words.

"The sun, my boys," he said very impressively, "never sets on Her Majesty's dominions!"

When school was over, and the bugle, that ever-sounding bugle, rang out the call for 'divisions' presently, we all bustled up, of course, to the upper deck, and, whether it was from the schoolmaster's observation or what, I'm sure I can't say, I was struck by the wonderful lot of fine fellows we had on board the training-ship: all wearing the same smart bluejacket uniform, men and boys alike, and all ready, I believe, even us youngsters who had but just joined the service, to go anywhere and do anything for the sake of the Queen—God bless her!—aye, and to battle likewise for the old flag and the old country that has had the command of the seas for a thousand years—so father says!

Why, there were over a hundred and eighty officers and men, besides some seven hundred odd boys present at muster.

Just fancy!

Yes; and though the men serve all the time of the ordinary three years' commission of the ship, the boys are ever coming and going, forty-five or thereabouts, all fresh ones, being entered every month on the books; while as many, probably, are drafted during the same interim to the guardship, for service with the fleet in all parts of the world!

Bear in mind, too, that the *Saint Vincent* is only one of some six or seven regular training-ships stationed at the principal ports round the kingdom, for the especial purpose of licking boys into shape for Her Majesty's Service; and that these aspirants for naval fame and glory number altogether ten thousand, such being really the quota of young boy-sailors provided for in the Admiralty estimates and added to the Navy every year.

Thinking thus, I rather lagged behind my comrades in going up the hatchway, only just succeeding in the nick of time in getting into my proper place forward on the starboard side of the ship as befitted my station; and where, being ahead of the line, I had a good view, while the inspection lasted, of the scene of my fight with 'Ugly.'

The boys were all drawn up in two long double rows facing each other, the ranks stretching away from where Mick and I stood near the knight-heads, to right abaft the mainmast; the first and third divisions, which together comprised the starboard watch, being on the right-hand side of the deck looking towards the bows, while the port watch was on the left, of equal strength and similarly stretched out—the watch stripes on the right or left arm, as the case might be, telling any chap who might chance to lose his latitude to which side he properly belonged.

I had already, of course, seen the imposing display which this muster of the boys on the upper deck invariably presented; but never before had I taken such stock of its various details.

However, before I could come to any conclusion in the matter, revolving, as I did, more things than I have yet spoken of in my busy brain, which seemed 'all wool-gathered' this morning, as father would have said had he been there and seen me star-gazing all round the compass, the boy-bugler on the bridge, who "had a purty foine chake of his own," as Mick observed to me on noticing his puffed-out mouth, blew a resonant blast.

It was the 'disperse.'

Hi, presto!

As if by magic, the imposing array of 'sucking bluejackets' whom I had just been gazing upon with a sort of personal admiration from the fact of my being one of their number, an admiration which was tempered by a slight feeling of awe of the discipline that controlled them, melted away almost noiselessly, like those Arabs who 'folded their tents' according to the poem,

the boys being all in their bare feet, and their patter along the deck and down the hatchways not making any sound above a faint shuffling; and soon this was drowned by the eldritch screeching of our friends the seagulls circling round on the wing in their wonted manner, and poising themselves anon in mid-air above the ship, looking down to see whether it was dinner-time yet aboard, and there was a chance of any stray scraps being chucked over the side from the 'gashing-tub,' or waste butt in which the refuse of our meals was thrown on the lower deck.

The new boys of both watches were told to stand by, by one of the seaman-instructors; and so, instead of racing down below with our older comrades, Mick and I, with the other nine who had lately joined, remained on the fore part of the deck.

"These boys, sir," said the instructor, touching respectfully his cap as he advanced towards the officer of the watch, who stood on the quarter-deck, a thin grey-haired old chap, whom I subsequently learnt was the gunner, though I never had the pleasure of seeing him before, "haven't been over the masthead yet, sir."

"All right," replied the gentleman addressed, saluting the instructor in his turn; the politeness and courteous deference paid on board all ships belonging to Her Majesty's Service from one officer to another, be his rank high or low, being one of the best lessons in manners that man or boy could have afloat or ashore, especially the latter. "Carry on!"

Permission, accordingly, being granted for the ordeal to which we were about to be subjected, the smart seaman-instructor came back to where we were drawn up in single file forwards.

"Now, my lads," he said, "you haven't any of you passed through your sea baptism yet, I think. Ever been up aloft, eh?"

He had stopped in front of 'Ugly,' whose face yet bore traces of our recent combat, although the cuts on his lip and nose had healed up; and, indeed, I couldn't well boast, for one of my eyes had a singularly picturesque greeny-yellow look still about it.

"Hoi?" exclaimed 'Ugly,' in his yokel fashion. "I dunno wot yer means, zur."

"Well, I'll soon tell you," rejoined the instructor. "I mean, have you ever been over the masthead?"

"No-a," said 'Ugly,' staring sheepishly at him; and then, as he followed his questioner's eye, on it glancing up aloft, he added, "Doos yer mean oop there, zur?"

"Aye."

"No-a, zur."

"Then, you'll have to go up now," said the instructor, in a tone that showed he intended to be obeyed. "Lads, attention!"

We all drew ourselves up, 'Ugly' included, as rigid and woodeny as those strange figures that are supposed to represent the patriarchs Shem, Ham, and Japheth seen in the Noah's arks of our childhood.

"Boys," cried the instructor in a louder key, pointing as he spoke, "you see the mainmast there?"

We signified assent as well as we were able to do without losing our rigidity or speaking, which latter is strictly against rules when an officer is giving any order, except when an answer is specially demanded.

Noticing, however, that we all looked in the right direction, the seaman-instructor was satisfied with this reply; but really there was no reason why he should not be so, for if we had not seen the tall spar that he pointed out we must all have been blind!

At all events, he was satisfied; and that is all that concerns us at present.

"Now, boys," he continued, "you've got to go over the top of that there masthead, climbing right up the rigging on the port side, and coming down to starboard. Let me see which of you will be first to get over the crosstrees, and woe betide the last! Away you go, now, the lot o' ye! 'Way aloft!"

It was child's play to me; for, as I told Larrikins the first day I was on board, when he was trying to 'pull my leg' with his yarns of the mountainous seas he met in the Channel cruising in the *Martin*, 'shinning up the rigging' was no novelty to me.

Before you could say 'Jack Robinson' I had quickly sprung into the lee rigging; and, clambering up the ratlines and then outward by the futtock shrouds, I gained the top long ere half the rest had started.

"Well done, my lad; I see you have been on board a ship before!" cried out the instructor, as I at once proceeded now to climb up to the crosstrees and over the head of the mast. "Look alive, you other chaps! That boy there will have done the job while you are thinking about it. Stir your stumps!"

'Ugly' was the last of the lot; and, as I came down on the weather or starboard side of the ship, the wind then blowing from the nor'ard and eastward, he was just trying to creep through 'the lubber's hole' into the top.

"No you don't," shouted up the instructor after him. "You must climb out by the futtock shrouds, as every proper sailor does."

Seeing, however, that poor 'Ugly' was quite in a fog, he turned to me as I stepped down from the chains and stood up in front of him, touching my cap to report myself as having accomplished my task.

"I say, my boy," said he, "what's your name?"

Of course I had to reply to this, and so I told him—

"Tom Bowling, sir."

"Ha!" he exclaimed, apparently surprised. "Any relation of that chap in the song who 'went aloft and did his duty'?"

I grinned.

"Yes, sir, I believe so," I said. "Father says as how our family is descended from him."

"I can quite believe it," observed the instructor kindly, with a pleasant smile on his face. "At all events, a sailor's blood runs in your veins, my lad; and, as you're such a good climber and know your way up the ratlines, just go up now and show that lubber of a greenhorn how to get up the futtock shrouds without tumbling, and so over the masthead."

Accordingly, I raced aloft the second time and soon fetched up to 'Ugly,' who, in a mortal funk, was trying to step out from the lower rigging on to the futtock shrouds, which, I may explain for the benefit of those who have not been to sea, stretch out laterally from the mast, and not in towards it, like the ordinary standing rigging below.

In spite of his difficulty, however, the surly brute now accepted my help with a very ill grace; muttering under his breath to himself some very unfriendly wishes in my respect, as, with some difficulty, I lugged him up into the top, almost by the scruff of his neck.

The rest of the journey up and down was easy enough; and 'Ugly,' rendered bold by having crossed his goal, the crosstrees, disdaining any further help from me, now started, after he had arrived in the top, again on the return voyage to climb down the shrouds by himself.

But hardly had he got his foot over the side of the top than his courage failed him; and I, looking up, on account of feeling the rigging shake, for I had gone down in advance from his telling me he 'didn't want no help from sich a cove as me,' saw that he was trembling like an aspen leaf, while his face was as pale as death.

"Hold on," I cried, "I'll be up with you in half a minute, and lend you a hand!"

I don't know whether he heard me or not as I scrambled up hastily towards him; but the next instant, losing his grip of the rope he was hanging on to somehow or other, he fell back on top of me, uttering a wild yell that was almost a scream, and which could have been heard ashore at Gosport!

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## **Chapter Eight.**

### **"The Sweets of Friendship."**

"How did you manage it, my boy?" panted out the instructor, out of breath by his rapid climb up the rigging to my aid, as I held on desperately to the shrouds, against which I pressed the body of my unconscious shipmate with my own, to prevent him from falling. "Lord! My lad, I thought you were both gone! Thank God, you saved him!"

But I could not tell him then, or after, how I contrived to catch 'Ugly' when he let go his hold; and to this very day, though it is pretty nearly six years or more ago, and many things have happened since even stranger, too, I put down the spontaneous act that prompted me to stretch out my hand in the nick of time and grip him by his waistbelt before it was too late, to the



interposition of Providence—an intervention, indeed, not only on his behalf, but on my own, as subsequent events proved, though I will speak of this when the proper time comes.

The instructor, even in his hurry aloft to our assistance, had managed to snatch up on the way a coil of half-inch; and with this he now proceeded, breathing heavily the while from his exertions, to secure 'Ugly' temporarily to the ratlines until a whip could be rigged for sending down the still insensible fellow to the deck below.

This was a great relief to me, for it was as much as I could do to support his body, although, as I've said, I pressed him against the rigging, the chap weighing over ten stone at least, I should think, as he was a thickset yokel and inclined to be corpulent.

It all happened in a moment, though I seem to take so long telling about it; for, almost before the instructor could take a double turn with his half-inch round 'Ugly's' body and the rigging, half-a-dozen seamen, who had been hailed by the officer of the watch, the grey-haired gunner, had footed it up the ratlines and were in the top fixing a whip and purchase, to which one of the hammocks had been attached.

In this impromptu cradle 'Ugly' was let down very carefully and taken to the sick-bay, where, as I was afterwards told, Mr Trimmens the sick-berth steward being my informant, it required the application of the galvanic battery to bring him to, the fright he had undergone, and consequent shock to his system, having been so great!

"You saved his life, though, my lad, let me tell you," said the instructor to me, when we had followed the rescued boy down, and were again on the safe footing of the deck. "Why, Tom Bowling, that chap ought to be your friend for life after this."

I could not help shrugging my shoulders, with a grin 'on the left side of my mouth,' as sailors say; for, of course, I could not very well explain matters anent our recent fight.

The instructor looked at me inquiringly; and, seeing he expected some sort of a reply from me, I said, "He'll have to change very much, sir. He and I haven't been very friendly up to now, sir."

"Ah!" rejoined the instructor, "that don't count, my boy. The dearest friend I have in the world at the present time was once my bitterest enemy. He and I fell out about some trifle or other

on joining the same ship and never spoke a single word to each other throughout the whole commission, though we were up the Straits at the time, and saw some queer rigs there, I can tell you. We've often laughed over it together since, and thought what fools we were."

"I don't think, sir," said I, "that Moses Reeks and I will ever be friends, so far as I can see."

"Well, time will tell," observed my good-natured adviser, who was a man like father, I saw, one always anxious to make the best of everything. "None of us ever know what will happen in this life, especially with sailor folk; and though you may think it difficult to 'make a silk purse out of a sow's ear,' for I can see, my lad, with half an eye that that unfortunate yokel is of a different stamp to you, still I've known stranger things occur. I wouldn't mind betting, if I ever did such a thing, that one day you and he will be the fastest chums."

"Perhaps, sir," I answered, in a very doubting manner; and I couldn't help adding, as I turned to go below to my dinner, if there should be any left for me, the other fellows having pretty well done by this time, "Some day, as father says, pigs may fly, sir!"

The instructor laughed.

"Your father, Tom Bowling," said he, giving me a friendly pat on the shoulder as I went down the after-hatchway, "must be a knowing hand; and I think, my lad, you take after him."

It being 'pea doo and bolliky' day, my fast friend Mick, who, from his highly developed instincts in the grub line, had been elected cook of our mess on the lower deck, had saved me a good basin of soup and hunch of bread, with which I managed to assuage the cravings of my appetite, this having been accentuated not only by my long wait but by my exercise aloft.

"Begorrah, Tom," said he, as he watched me tucking into the stuff with great complacency, while the rest of the fellows were cleaning up the mess-table and generally making things snug, "it's as good as aitin' onesilf fur to say how ye git outside that pay-soup. An ould play-acting chap I onst sayd a-swallerin' knoives an' sich loike onnatural stuff, worn't a patch on ye, me hearty!"

I had, however, to make short work of my meal, for the 'assembly' just then sounded; and, after our usual parade again

on deck, according to the routine, a part of our division went ashore to a large field between Blockhouse Fort and Haslar on the Gosport side of the water, belonging to the *Saint Vincent*, and which is used for drilling the boys in marching and small-arm instruction.

Some of the remainder of us were put to signalling on the upper deck, carrying on highly interesting dialogues with small flags that were waved to and fro between the bows and stern of the ship; but the major part of the division—I, much to my delight, being one of the number—practised all the afternoon at boat-pulling. In this my experience with father's wherry during the last three or four years stood me in good stead; though I had some little difficulty at first in mastering the usual man-o'-war stroke with the long ash oars in the heavy launch which we pulled, the boat being double-banked.

The next day was the most exciting I had passed since I had been on board the ship, now over a week.

To begin with, it was 'pay-day,' the whole ship's company marching up to the paymaster in turn at the temporary office he had rigged up *al fresco*, as Mick's 'Oitalian' friends would say, on the upper deck, and receiving each his weekly pay; the boys being allowed, those of the first-class a shilling, and those of the second sixpence, for pocket-money, the balance being saved up to their account or else forwarded to their parents.

Much amusement was caused amongst us as we received the respective coins to which we were entitled, each holding out his cap for them; for a sailor, you know, puts everything in his cap. Pocketing our coin as we went below, Mick created the greatest fun of all as he spit on his and spun it in the air. "Hooray!" he cried out, against the regulations, though, fortunately for himself, not too loud, as he skated down the hatchway. "Begorrah, it's the foorst money Oi iver arnt in me loif! Faith, Tom mabouchal, we'll spind it together an' hev a rig'ler jollification ashore!"

The bugle sounded 'cooks to their messes' as Mick was saying this; and so off he hurried to the galley on the fore part of the middle deck when we had got down the hatchway, I following after him.

On passing the entry-port, however, my old friend the master-at-arms hailed me.

"Hi, Tom Bowling!" he called out, beckoning me into the office; "I hope you haven't been getting into any row?"

"Not that I know of, sir," said I, flabbergasted by his question. "Why, sir?"

"Because the captain left word he wants to speak to you," he replied. "You must go up again on the main-deck to his quarters aft."

Thoroughly frightened at this, I proceeded as he had directed me; and, on reaching the door of the captain's cabin, the marine sentry standing outside passed on my name and I was ushered in.

Cap in hand and in a state of much trepidation, I went along the gangway with him; and 'bringing up' opposite an open door, I rapped at this with my heart in my mouth.

"Hallo!" cried a voice within. "Who's there?"

"T-t-t," I stammered— "T-T'm Bowling, sir."

"Oh!" exclaimed the same voice, in a softer and more kindly tone than at first, when, I confess, it sounded rather gruff and peremptory. "Come in, Tom Bowling."

With this, I went into what seemed to my eye, expecting, as I did, something very different on board ship, one of the grandest apartments I had ever seen; with sofas and pictures, and big looking-glasses, besides a piano at the end, just like a drawing-room. Why, the Queen herself couldn't have had a finer place to live in!

The captain, who, of course, was the owner of the voice that had previously spoken, I saw was a nice, pleasant-faced, good-looking officer, looking every inch a sailor, and a smart one too!

He was sitting in a comfortable easy-chair that was fitted with gimbals, like the compass card in a binnacle, or some other appliance which permitted the occupant to shift round as he pleased without moving the seat; as my commanding officer did now, in order to face me.

"Don't be afraid, my lad," he said kindly, seeing, no doubt, how nervous I looked. "I've only sent for you to let you know that I have been told of your exceedingly courageous conduct just now in saving your shipmate from a terrible death. I'm glad to

see that you are bearing out by your behaviour the strong recommendation Captain Mordaunt, who is an old friend of mine, sent me when you came to join the service."

I declare you could have knocked me down with a feather on his saying this, the revulsion of feeling being so great; for I had expected something totally different, so I hardly knew what to say.

"Th-a-ank you, sir," I at last managed to get out. "I—I—I am very much obliged to you, sir."

"No obligation at all, my lad," he said, smiling. "I am only giving you your due, for I think you have really behaved in a very plucky manner, and deserve all that I have said, and more. I must tell you, though, I have heard something else also about you, Tom Bowling, which, perhaps, I might have been inclined to speak about, for I don't like any fighting or ill-feeling between the boys under my command here; but, after what has occurred, I shall not take any notice of what I might have heard to your detriment. Besides, I believe you were not particularly in fault, all things considered."

Fancy! He must have been told of the fight between 'Ugly' and me.

My face, no doubt, expressed the thoughts that passed through my mind; and, as I could see from a mirror opposite me, I appeared, as father used to say, "like a cat looking nine ways for Sunday!"

The captain, though, evidently wished to set me at my ease.

"Never mind, my boy," he said reassuringly. "We'll let bygones be bygones; and, as you have so nobly condoned the offence of fighting with your shipmate by subsequently saving his life, I feel more inclined to reward than punish you. Have you been allowed ashore yet to see your parents since you joined?"

"No, sir," I replied. "I didn't have my uniform rig last Sunday, sir."

"Well, then, my boy, you may go and see them this afternoon if you like, when you've finished your dinner. I will give you leave till Eight Bells."

So saying, he scribbled on a piece of paper and handed it to me.

This was a pass, permitting me to be absent from the ship until the time specified on it.

Noticing, as I thanked him for his kindness, that I did not appear perfectly satisfied, he glanced at me scrutinisingly. His eye was like a gimlet, and seemed to penetrate my inmost thoughts; for, I declare, he guessed the feeling that was uppermost in my mind.

"Would you like, my lad," he said, smiling again, "to take a chum with you ashore?"

"Why, sir," I exclaimed, "that was the very thing I was thinking of!"

"Ha!" said he, "I fancied that was what was on your mind. Who is your chum?"

"Mick Donovan, sir," I replied; "he's an Irish lad who joined the ship the same time as me."

"All right; Mick Donovan shall go with you," said he. "Hand me back your pass."

This I did; whereupon he bracketed Mick's name with mine and returned me the paper.

"You may go now," he said kindly, seeing the rush of joy that must have been reflected on my face, filling, as it did, my heart, though I hesitated to leave without his permission, albeit anxious to communicate the good news to Mick. "Stop, Tom, here's half-a-crown for you and your chum to enjoy yourselves with."

He put the money into my hand as he spoke, extracting it from his pocket for the purpose; and, I recollect, it was a nice new bright half-crown piece, which, though it was 'melted' very soon, will never pass out of my remembrance as quickly as it did from my possession!

Of course I thanked him before leaving; and, in going below, I halted at the police office, to tell the master-at-arms the result of my interview with our chief, whereat he appeared much satisfied, though he cautioned me to continue to be a good boy and not outstay my leave.

Making my way from thence below, it didn't take me long to fetch up alongside Mick, who almost exploded with delight on

my informing him we were to go ashore together. He pitched the piece of 'gammy duff' he was carving on his plate, which, by the way, was as hard as a brickbat, with the raisins or 'gammies' which it contained barely at signal distance apart, right up above his head to the deck beam, where it caught on to one of the hooks and remained a fixture.

"Bedad, Tom, ye're an anjul if ivver ther wor one," he cried, capering about as if he were mad. "We'll hev a splindid toime of it entoirely. Faith, Oi'll go and git me hair cut, to look like a jintlemin, afore I says yer sisther an' yer fayther and moother!"

"I think I'll do the same, Mick," said I. "They haven't seen me in my bluejacket rig yet, and I want to look as smart as I can too!"

Accordingly, the two of us had recourse to the ship's barber, who cropped us both so close that it would have puzzled anybody to have caught hold of what hair was left on the heads of either, aye even between his thumb and forefinger.

As a boat was leaving the ship early in the afternoon, we went in her; when, being landed at Point, we soon found our way to Bonfire Corner, I, of course, acting as the navigator.

Dear me, no one ever saw such a homecoming in their life before as that of mine that day!

Jenny, who was dusting a mat at the door, rushed frantically into my arms, mat and all, my little sister hugging me as if we had really been parted for years, instead of only for the short spell of time that had elapsed since our separation; and my mother, who was not so demonstrative, was quite as glad, I know, to see me; while as for father, who was having a spell-off in the backyard with his pipe, he beamed all over at the sight of me in my uniform.

"Lor', Tom!" he ejaculated, on my taking him unawares, with his head leaning back and the long churchwarden he was smoking dropping out of his mouth, for he had just started, with his eyes closed, for a 'lay off the land,' as he styled taking a snooze. "Ye're the very h'image of what I wer' when I wer' your age—though not quite so good-looking I'm a-thinking!"

He said this in joke, for he and I were in the habit when in the wherry together of carrying on in that way and chaffing each other; but mother, who had followed me up, with Jenny behind her and Mick Donovan keeping close company in her wake, took poor father up with a round turn!

"What do you know what you were like at his age?" she cried. "Judging by your present figurehead, you couldn't have been much to boast of!"

"Couldn't I?" rejoined father. "I tell you what, Sarah, there wer' a lot more gals 'sides you as was a-runnin' arter me when I was a youngster and first jined the sarvice!" Hearing my mother's name mentioned, old 'Ally Sloper' at once struck up a screech, hopping through from the shop to join us.

"Say-rah, Say-rah!" he screamed, ruffling up the lemon crest on the top of his head, and spreading out the feathers round his neck that made him look as if he wore high collars. "I'll wring your neck!"

I thought Mick Donovan would have died of laughing on hearing the cockatoo speak so funnily, his mirth being so contagious that we all followed suit; and, what with the screeching and screaming of the other birds, which seemed to take 'Ally Sloper's' cry for a signal and chimed in, you never heard such a row in your life.

"Bedad, Oi'm kilt entoirely!" exclaimed Mick, when he had well-nigh laughed himself black in the face. "Oi nivver heerd such a baste in me loife fur talkin', to bay sure!"

That made us all begin the concert over again; and I really think we kept on laughing and then stopping, only to break out again, until mother spread the table for tea, just to "shut our mouths," as she said.

Both she and father were really pleased to see Mick, whom they had welcomed as my chum in the first instance, but presently began to like for his own sake after his being but a very short time in their presence—he was such a jolly chap all round!

My sister, however, seemed a bit shy with him, as indeed Mick appeared to be with her, the two hardly exchanging a word; though I noticed that when Jack, the thrush, commenced calling out in his soft way, "Jenny! Jenny!" Mick flushed up like a boiled lobster.

"Faith," he exclaimed, "that's a foine burd, an' a purty burd too; an', begorrah, he spakes the purtiest name I ivver heerd tell on in me loife."

He looked at Jenny as he said this; when, she too coloured up.



I couldn't tell you all that occurred that happy day, for the moments flew by like winking; and bye-and-bye we had to set sail again for our ship, laden with all sorts of good things to help out our diet on board, especially an enormous pot of jam, which mother said would last us for tea till we were able to come ashore again for another supply.

Father came with us down to Hardway, offering to put us on board in his wherry; and, though it was a longer voyage thence back to the ship than from Point, the tide being fortunately in our favour, we reached the *Saint Vincent* in good time, going up the accommodation ladder on the port side, which, as you know, is devoted to the use of the lower deck portion of the crew, just as Eight Bells struck.

"Ha, my lads," cried the 'Jaunty,' who stood by the entry-port, "you've just saved your bacon!"

The other fellows were just coming down from skylarking; and, going below with the lot, we found time before turning in—Mick having declared that he was "hungry enuf to ate an illiphant"—to sample the stock of grub mother had so thoughtfully provided us with.

The sight of the big jam-pot, however, presently attracted a crowd of sympathisers around us, whose affability and kindly attentions, nay, even respectful demeanour, was something wonderful.

Mick and I never knew till then what dear friends we had aboard; any boy with whom we might have exchanged a chance word appearing as delighted to see us again as if we had risen from the dead.

Amongst these, Larrikins was prominent.

"Lor', Tom Bowling," he whispered to me, as he sidled up near, "yer knows I tuk a fancy to yer when I see'd yer first."

"So you did, my joker," said I, of course seeing through his 'little game,' as well as that of 'Ginger,' the other first-class boy who had been told off to attend to us novices, and had, it may be remembered, acted as 'Ugly's' second. "You cut me down when I was in my hammock the first night I was aboard. That was a strong proof of your friendship towards me, eh, Larrikins?"

"Ah, Tom, that were only a little joke, don-cher-no," he replied, with a grin and a wink of the most expressive character, "Lor', yer don't bear no mallerce, I knows!"

What could I say?

He was not half a bad fellow either; and so, having experienced many a little kindness from him as a new hand, in spite of his strong propensity for practical-joking at my expense, which I do not believe he could have possibly resisted under any circumstances, I passed the word to Mick to make him free of the jam-pot.

So, too, with the rest of those that hung round us, sailors and sailor-boys generally being generous alike by nature and inclination; and the end of it was, that the supply which mother thought would have lasted Mick and me till we saw her again, vanished the same night!

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## **Chapter Nine.**

### **I Become a "First-Class Boy."**

Our life aboard after this passed very evenly, though not uneventfully; for there was hardly a day that something did not occur as interesting as it was novel to our previous experience.

Talk of a sailor's life being dull! Why, it's full of incident, full of interest, full of adventure; and even on board a harbour ship, like the *Saint Vincent*, I tell you, there is sport to be had afloat as well as ashore!

We had a rat-hunt once, some three or four weeks after I joined the ship.

The captain's dog, a fine cock-eared fox-terrier named 'Gyp,' with the most wonderful eyes, and a nose that worked with excitement as quickly as his short-cropped tail, which was docked to half an inch and was ever on the wag, got into the habit of coming forward on the forecastle whenever he was let out of his master's cabin, in the most unaccountable manner.

Now 'Gyp,' you must know, was a rather particular dog in his way, keeping to his own station when below; while, should he be taken up on the quarter-deck by the captain, or accompany

any of the other officers there, he would never, as a rule, advance farther towards the fore part of the ship than the main-hatchway.

All of a sudden, however, master 'Gyp' takes it into his head to make free of the forecastle, and associate with such of the lower deck men who might chance to be there.

This, of course, was derogatory to his dignity as a captain's dog; but, although remonstrated with by his master's valet, who had charge of him when the captain did not take him ashore—aye, and even whipped for thus straying forwards—'Gyp' would persist in his unseemly predilection for low life, utterly regardless of his proper rank as an officer, with a collar and badge. This article was of gold lace, and became him well, contrasting favourably with his black-and-tan head and soft white coat, which latter was guiltless of spot or blemish.

The fact was, I had better acknowledge it at once so as to preserve the poor animal's character, which was, and is, so far as I know up to the present, as spotless as his coat, never having had a slur cast upon it, save in this one respect, that 'Gyp,' as the master-at-arms said, in his funny way, "smelt a mice."

Not only that, 'Gyp' smelt rats; and, what is more, he managed to nab one very cleverly as the rodent was leisurely hopping up the hatchway in the most free and easy manner from below, with a piece of cheese in its mouth which the beggar had appropriated from the steward's pantry, or from the mess of some Johnny below!

This happened in the afternoon, just after inspection on the upper deck and when the divisions were dispersing to their respective drills, for I was going below with some of the other chaps at the time to man the pumps on the orlop deck, the second time I had been put to this job since I had come on board, and I can't say I liked it!

Now, whether 'Gyp' carried the rat he had captured cosily to the captain's quarters, or through some one taking the tale aft, I'm sure I can't say; but, while the working party of us boys told off to clear the bilge were pumping away for dear life, and looking out for old Jellybelly, who was superintending our task, to sing out 'spell ho!' to give us breathing time, down comes a lot of the officers after their lunch, with the captain at the head of them, accompanied by Master 'Gyp,' who, somehow or other, didn't need anybody to show him the way, though he hadn't

been below in the ship there to my knowledge before, his nose being as good as a compass, and pointing out where he thought his services might be required.

"I hear, Tarbolt," said the captain, addressing old Jellybelly by his proper name, "you have rats aboard here?"

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the quarter-master, drawing himself up sharp from the act of touching up with his cane one of the boys a little way from me, whom he fancied wasn't putting sufficient elbow grease into his work. "I believe, sir, as how the ship reg'lerly swarms with 'em. They wore working away, sir, last night at some of the b'ys' hammicks; and one of 'em yelled out that they was nibblin' their toes!"

"Oh!" cried the captain, "we must put a stop to that. My dog here is a good ratter, and I think he'll be able to polish off a few for you. Where do you think, Tarbolt, the brutes hang out?"

"Away forrard, sir, under some o' that spare gear thet's stowed there, sir; and likewise down in the bilge amongst the ballast and dunnage."

"Very good; shove your lantern, Tarbolt, over here," said the captain, edging forwards as he spoke, with 'Gyp' and the rest of the officers a-following him. "Boys, you can stand off for a bit from your pumping and come and see the fun."

We didn't need any further invitation, being only too glad to let go of the beastly crank-handles; not to speak of the interest we took in the anticipated enjoyable sport.

"Hi, 'Gyp,' rats!" shouted the captain, when we all came up to a pile of old casks and sails in the fore peak. "Go for 'em, good dog!"

The wardroom steward and the captain's valet had come down in the rear of the officers, each of them provided with a lantern; and so, what with the lights we already had with us, the place was sufficiently illuminated for all to see the whole proceedings, which, needless to say, we witnessed with the utmost delight, Mick, who was alongside of me, staring open-mouthed, his face one broad grin from ear to ear.

"Begorrah!" he whispered to me. "Sure, it bates Bannagher, an's a'most as good as what Oi've heerd tell of Donnybrook Fair, in the ould toimes, from me fayther!"

All we could see of 'Gyp' for some little time was a portion of his stern quarters, with his little butt-end of a tail wagging away at high-pressure speed, just like the escapement of a clock from which the pendulum has been temporarily taken, so that it has for the moment no check on its action.

Then, all at once, with a low growl, and every individual hair on his white coat standing erect, his whole body the while quivering with excitement, 'Gyp' plunged forwards and disappeared into darkness, only to reappear an instant later with an enormous rat, which he had gripped in the small of the back, the vicious beast trying to worm itself round so as to tackle his nose.

'Gyp,' however, knew a trick worth two of that, and, as he emerged into the open again, chucked the rat up aloft in the air, almost to the deck beams, and then, pouncing on it as the brute fell back under his expectant jaws, the terrier severed its head from its body with one snap!

Another and another, and yet another, he served in like fashion, ferreting in amongst the dunnage, and then coming out again with a fresh victim each time; until, presently, finding their retreat 'too warm' for them, the rats sallied out in a crowd, skating over the deck and climbing up the bulkheads to get out of the way of their relentless enemy. The lot of us then coming to the aid of 'Gyp,' the captain and all catching up anything handy to have a shy at them, the family of rodents that had been having such a gay old time below for so long without interference, was soon exterminated; after which the dog and his master, with the other officers, returned to the main-deck, while we resumed our work at the pumps all the more heartily from the bit of play we had had, old Jellybelly never once grumbling again till we had done.

We had a good rise out of the old quarter-master the very same evening, though, which was rather ill-natured on our part.

He was on duty at the gangway, when one of the new chaps, who, like Larrikins, had a great bent for practical skylarking, went to him with a smug face, as innocent as you please.

"I say, sir," said he, in a tone of the deepest sympathy, "don't you feel werry tired, sir, a-standing theer so long?"

"Aye, my son," replies old Jellybelly, thinking to himself, no doubt, that the chap showed wonderful good feeling for a boy; he regarding them all as a rule, not without reason probably, as

imps of mischief. "It is rather tiring sometimes. I feels it in my bones and all down my legs."

"Then, sir," rejoined the young demon, who only wanted to draw him out and laugh at him, "why doesn't yer sit down on the rail, sir?"

Of course, this would have been almost a penal offence for the quarter-master to have done, he being on duty at an appointed station; and the remark he made as his tormentor made off with a laugh, which was joined in by all the adjacent boys, was a caution.

Mick, not long after this, had Mr Brown, the ship's corporal, nicely too.

He crammed his bag and a lot of other things into his blanket, which he rolled up so as to represent a sort of lay figure, stowing this into his hammock at turning-in time, just before the 'out lights' sounded.

Keeping as grave as a judge, Mick then went up to the corporal.

"If y' playse, sor," said he, "some gossoon or t'other, sor, has bin an' gone an' got into me hammick, sor, bad cess to him!"

"Oh, has he, Paddy," replied Mr Brown, switching his cane, and then drawing it as he gripped it with his right hand carefully through his left, as if feeling whether it had the right sort of edge on it or no. "I'll soon make him shift his billet, my boy."

We, of course, were all in the joke, and watched Mr Brown with great glee as he stole stealthily up to Mick's hammock and let fly a shower of blows on the supposed intruder's body, accompanying the caning with some pertinent remarks of a very forcible nature anent the offender's want of manners and unneighbourliness towards a brother shipmate; whereupon we all burst into a regular guffaw, and Mick sought refuge in flight on the exposure of his little plot before Mr Brown could pay him out.

The corporal, though, took it in very good part, and did not bear my chum any subsequent ill-will for thus taking him in; albeit, he was wary enough to be on his guard against Mick hoaxing him a second time.

Jokes like these came as little interludes, so to speak, to 'ease the wheels' of our duties, which, however, were to me, at all

events, more of a pleasure than so many tasks; that is, after I had gone through the initiatory instructions and drills, and was able to hold my own with the smartest of my shipmates.

I cannot say, though, that I cared much for the schooling, seven months of which every second-class boy on board the *Saint Vincent* has to undergo before he can gain the first rank.

Equally as certainly, however, I must allow that the teaching I gained, watch and watch about, in that big schoolroom astern on the lower deck turned out of considerable assistance to me, not only in my subsequent experience afloat in the navy, especially when serving abroad, but ashore too; for I there learnt the art of learning things, which is the great secret of education to man or boy, though we youngsters do not realise this when we have the chance of getting hold of it.

But it was the seamanship instruction that I went in for with the greatest zest; and, from knotting and splicing up to compass, and helm, and signalling, I don't think I fell far short of what Captain Mordaunt said when he persuaded father to let me go to sea and join the training-ship—that I was a born sailor and a regular 'chip of the old block.'

In connection with this, I may state, that of all the practical lessons I learnt in sailing on board the *Saint Vincent*, the going aloft for sail-drill used to please me best.

Every morning at eight o'clock we used to go up the rigging and practise loosing and furling the sails, crossing the royal-yards, and making all things snug before coming down on deck to our usual divisional instruction.

On Mondays the whole forenoon was devoted to these evolutions, the sails being set one after the other, topsails, topgallants, royals, and even stu'nsails sometimes, besides the courses and headsails below; until, often, the whole ship was piled with canvas as if she were fetching down Channel on a cruise, her spars quivering with the strain frequently, when we had the wind abeam from the southward and east'ard, and every rope as taut as a bar of iron!

We used to work our way from the lower yards to the dignity of the upper by rotation more than through any special smartness and activity; and I know I was as pleased as Punch when it came to my turn to be an 'upper-yard boy.'

I was never so happy as when aloft; and many a time up there of a morning have I gazed out to seaward, looking over Southsea beach and the boats clustered in the fairway, that seemed but little dots from the height where I was, to the open stretch of water beyond Spithead and Saint Helens, that seemed to draw my heart to it like a magnet, making me long to leave my present stay at home surroundings and sail away and away on the boundless deep.

This desire of mine was gratified in part after I had been serving for nine months as a second-class boy, and passed satisfactorily through all my drills and instructions; when Mick and I got promoted.

Strangely enough, my chum the Irish lad proved himself, landsman though he had been before and never having even smelt the sea prior to his coming to Portsmouth, quite as expert as myself after a short stay aboard the training-ship; though I had been associated with ships and seafaring folk from the time I drew my first breath, and indeed, like all the Bowlings, as I told you at the beginning of my yarn, was born with the taste for 'the briny,' the feeling being inherent to my blood.

It strikes me, though, that my sister Jenny had something to do with this.

Mick heard her say the first day when I first took him home with me to visit father and mother at Bonfire Corner, that she loved sailors, and wondered how any young fellow could possibly care for anything else, when he had a chance of going afloat and serving his Queen and country, and fighting the battles of Old England.

The remark was a chance one; but, though Mick must have heard Jenny say a good many other things, for he was often at our house afterwards, being generally in the habit of accompanying me home when I had leave to go, he never forgot those words and somehow or other seemed to strive his best to reach Jenny's ideal.

So, you see, smart seaman though I fancied myself to be even at that early age, I had to look out lest I should be supplanted by my own chum; for no sooner did I get the start of him in one thing than he would fetch alongside of me and be working ahead before I well knew where I was, the 'owdacious young beggar,' as father dubbed him, becoming actually a 'royal-yard boy' the following week to myself, while both of us, as I have said, were made first-class boys together.



Unfortunately, this was during the winter months; and, as the training-brig *Martin*, which is attached to the *Saint Vincent* as a sea-going tender in order to cruise about in the Channel to give the boys practical experience of their profession—like a frolicsome chick hanging round a broody old hen that won't leave her nest—does not go out of harbour till the spring, Mick and I were unable for some time to take advantage of the grand privilege of our rise and really go to sea.

We thought the blissful period would never come.

But 'it's a long lane that knows no turning'; and, winter ebbing away into the flood of spring anon, we, with some ninety and nine other youngsters of the same standing, set sail one fine April morning from Portsmouth Harbour, the *Martin* slipping her buoy abreast of Blockhouse Fort, and standing out into the Solent under easy canvas, with a fair wind from the nor'-east.

A hundred boys are always taken at a time for a month's cruise in the brig, the lot being accompanied by some of the smartest seamen belonging to the complement of the mother training-ship, so that they have every opportunity of picking up now the nautical knowledge necessary to make them worth their salt, in reference both to seamanship and gunnery.

We had a pretty fair knock-about time in the Channel, running down to Plymouth and back, having a 'sojer's wind,' one that was fair both ways, out and home again; and, though, from this fact, we necessarily made an easy passage of it, some of the boys were woefully seasick, many of them never having been at sea before.

Notably among these was Mick.

"Bedad!" moaned he, leaning over the side with his dark face turned to pale green that seemed a faint reflection of the water below, into which he looked apparently with the deepest interest as he sacrificed his dearly loved dinner to Neptune, paying the sea-god his dues, "Oi fale, Tom me darlint, as if Oi'd brought up iverythink, faith, since furst Oi jined the ship, an' me boots, begorrah, same in the back of me hid! Wurrah, wurrah, why did Oi ivver come to say? Och, Tom mabouchal, kill me at onst, and be done with it!"

I could not help laughing at him, he presented such a contrast to the buoyant lad of my ordinary acquaintance; though, of course, I tried to sympathise with my woe-begone chum.

But ere long something occurred which made him, and the others in a like predicament, forget their seasickness in a hurry, all of us having to be as spry as we could.

The *Martin* took the ground!

I'll tell you how this happened.

We had run up Channel, as I have told you, with a fair wind from the start; but, on our reaching the westernmost end of the Isle of Wight, this turned against us, so that after passing through the Needles we had to beat up the Solent in the teeth of a stiff sou'-easter.

This, of course, gave us plenty of exercise in tacking; and the constant going aloft, with the brig rolling and a choppy sea under her, had overset the equilibrium of poor Mick's stomach.

We had tacked and 'reached' in this way for some time, making short boards between the Hampshire coast and the Island opposite; when, in going about off the Brambles, through one of the uncertain currents which infest Southampton Water taking her on the slant as we shivered our headsails to come up to the wind, the brig missed stays and struck on the edge of the shoal.

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## **Chapter Ten.**

### **"Under Fire!"**

"Look alive, my lads!" shouted out our tall commander, as we stumbled about the deck of the brig, the shock as her keel touched ground knocking us off our pins and making the poor seasick chaps who were holding their heads over the side pull them in pretty promptly. "Watch, furl sails! 'Way aloft!"

The sheets and halliards were let go in a twinkling before we left the deck and the topsails dropped on the caps, as well as the jib downhaul manned and the spanker brailed up, so as to prevent our being forced farther upon the shoal; and, while we were shinning up the rigging, the clewlines and buntlines were hauled by the watch below, which got in all the slack of the sails preparatory to our passing the gaskets when we got aloft, thus enabling us to furl all the canvas, and make everything snug in less time than I take to tell of it.

In the meanwhile our commander made himself busy in other ways, the cutter being lowered and a party of seamen and boys sent in her with a kedge to drop astern and try to warp off; the port bower anchor being dropped at the same time, and a spring set on the cable, which was buoyed so that we could slip it in a moment in the event of her suddenly floating.

A 'distant signal' was also hoisted at the main, consisting of a square flag on top with a ball below, which meant that we were aground and wanted assistance, to let the men on watch at the Hurst Castle signal-station know what was up with us; and, in addition, our smart commanding officer put on a party of boys at the pumps, to see whether the brig might not have strained her timbers and sprung a leak, through working about on the nasty sand bottom of the Brambles.

This latter precaution, however, proved a useless one; for the gang of eager lads working away with a will at the crank-handles of the pumps, soon cleared the little amount of water that was in the bilge, and the shaft sucked dry.

"Ther' ain't a drop in her," reported Mr Tarbolt, the quarter-master, 'old Jellybelly,' as we called him amongst ourselves. "I don't think, sir, as how she's made a h'inch since we passed the Needles and last cleared ship."

"Very good, quarter-master," said the commander; "you can stop pumping."

The chaps who had gone off in the cutter had been equally spry with their job, bending on a stout hemp hawser through the ring of the kedge anchor, which they dropped some half a cable's length from the brig, bringing back the other end aboard, where it was put round the capstan on the forecastle.

This was at once manned, there being no want of volunteers, every one of us wanting to have a turn at the capstan bars, even before Mr Gadgett, the gunner, who was on duty forward, gave the word.

But it was a case of 'yo heave' and 'paul' in vain, the hemp cable coming home as taut as possible, and then surging off the capstan without moving the poor little *Martin* a hair's-breadth from her sandy bed.

"We must get out the stream anchor, Mr Gadgett," sang out the commander. "Look alive there and rig out the davits, and send

some hands into the cutter to stow the anchor properly when we lower it down!"

This was done, the heavy stream anchor, which was always kept ready on the forecastle in case of any such emergency, being eased down by means of its shank painter and the fish tackle until it rested comfortably across the sternsheets of the boat; while another stout hawser accompanying it, was coiled round the whole interior of the boat on top of the thwarts.

The cutter then pulled off to about the same distance at which the kedge had been dropped, though more on the quarter of the brig than dead aft; and, the end of the second hawser being brought aboard like the first, all hands set to work with a cheery song, as we had no drum and fife band with us in the brig—for, though not strictly according to naval discipline, the commander permitted the licence so as to make the fellows move round all the smarter.

"Yo—ho, my lads!" bawled out old Jellybelly, quite in his element, I believe, as he liked to hear his own voice. "Round she comes! Heave and haul with a yo—heave—ho!"

"By jingo, she's moving!" Mr Gadgett quivered out, more excited than I had ever seen the grey-haired gunner before. "Another turn or two, my lads, and she'll be afloat!"

His excitement communicated itself to the commander aft, who was looking over the stern and anxiously watching the water, to see if our rudder, which was kept amidships, made any ripple on the surface; though, wide awake, our officer was keeping a keen eye, too, on the manilla hawser attached to the stream anchor, which was in such a ticklish state of tension from the strain that it was singing out like a fiddle-string.

"Hurrah!" he cried a moment after. "She *is* moving, Mr Gadgett. Stand by there, furrud, to veer off the cable of the port bower!"

Tramp, tramp, went the fellows round the capstan; turn by turn, in came the slack of the warp; and then in another five minutes or so, with a harsh grating sound as her keel slid off a rocky bit of the shoal on which she had rested, the gallant little *Martin* was afloat again!

Almost at the same instant as the dancing motion of her hull told us that the brig had been restored to her native element, the commander, wishing to get away as soon as he could from the dangerous neighbourhood of the Brambles, gave an order to

the boatswain's mate standing near him, who instantly put his whistle to his lips and blew a shrill call whose import we all well knew.

"Watch, make sail!" then shouted the commander, rubbing his hands with much satisfaction. "Topmen, aloft and loose the topsails! Let go your topsail halliards! Man the head sheets!"

While these directions were being carried out, the port bower was weighed; when the jib being hoisted and the topsails dropped and sheeted home, the brig paid off on the starboard tack, picking up the kedge and stream anchor as soon as we fetched over them in rounding-to.

The cutter, which had remained alongside ready for further use if required, was then hoisted up to the davits; and the *Martin*, spreading her wings again properly, made off towards Cowes just as one of the Government tugs, which had been despatched to our assistance from the dockyard on the receipt of a telegraphic message from Hurst Castle telling of our mishap, came round the corner of Stokes Bay, puffing away at a fine rate, and throwing up a cloud of black smoke that spoilt the beauty of the landscape, and shut out everything to leeward from view.

"Begorrah!" said Mick, from whom the fine fuss and fright and flurry had banished all traces of his previous illness, making him as right as ninepence again, "they're jist in toime to be too late, sure!"

Our commander exchanged signals with the people on the tug, however, telling them that their services were not required, though thanking them for the help they would have rendered us; and the wind, which had been shifting about to all parts of the compass while we had been ashore on the sand ledge, now veering to the south'ard and west'ard, we bore away before it with squared yards up the Solent towards Spithead, where we anchored for the night, almost in the fairway, abreast of Southsea Castle.

Next morning we came into harbour, when a dockyard diver was sent down to see if the brig had sustained any damage from her pranks of the previous day; but, all being found staunch and sound below, only the copper on her keel having received a little extra polish, we were ordered to go out again into the Channel and continue our cruise.

The most noteworthy feature of this, excepting, of course, the setting and reefing and taking in sail on board a moving vessel, instead of practising all these merely in dumb-show as had been our wont in a stationary ship like the *Saint Vincent*, was the exercise we had with the old-fashioned little muzzle-loading truck guns, which were mounted on wooden carriages of the sort only seen in the old *Victory* nowadays, with which the *Martin* was provided.

It was great fun.

The boys in turn detailed to act as crews of the guns used to be numbered off in regular fashion, according to the custom of the service, just as if they were grown men and working on board a ship going into action.

Number 1, who was the captain of the gun, stood in the rear; Number 2, on the right of the former, but clear of the recoil, as if to teach one that prominent and distinguished positions have their drawbacks as well as their advantages; Number 3 stood close up to the ship's side, by the breeching of the gun on the left; and Number 4 occupied a similar post on the right, while Numbers 5 and 6 stood in the rear of 3 and 4, and so on.

Through the energetic instructions of Mr Gadgett, who was a most painstaking officer, and spared no trouble to teach us our duties properly, we had learnt when ashore on our drill-ground at Haslar to master all the necessary manipulation of our 'little barkers,' as the gunner used to call them, learning how to cast them loose from their lashings, run them back for loading, and prepare them for firing, all in similar dumb-show fashion to our sail-drill experiences in the old ship; and now, when we were able to load with real powder and shot, and make Mr Gadgett's 'barkers' bark in earnest, the interest of our gunnery drill was increased tenfold.

It was splendid work; and from the first order, 'Cast loose!' to the last, 'Fire!' it was exciting to the last degree, all of us sponging, loading, and running out the little guns in the highest of spirits, as if we were fighting the Battle of Trafalgar over again, and throwing shot and shell into any number of French and Spanish three-deckers alongside!

We had hard work sometimes to check ourselves from uttering a wild cheer when the order was given to pull the trigger and the gun went off with a grand 'Bang!' sending a cloud of white smoke inboard from its muzzle as its fiery iron messenger leaped forwards and splashed into the sea, either ahead or

abeam as the case might be, throwing up a tall column of water on its first plunge that was like a sort of fountain, while it skipped onward, playing 'ducks and drakes' on the top of the waves, until it sank out of sight in the distance, its energy exhausted.

We often used to rig out a target, made up out of an old rum puncheon, fixed on a raft of spars, which we fired at as at a mark, making very good practice, too, after a bit.

Mick soon became one of our best shots, Mr Gadgett complimenting him on having the sharpest eye on board the brig, my chum often, when acting as Number 1, who you must know invariably sights the gun, succeeding in smashing our improvised target all to pieces.

"How is it, Donovan," asked the gunner on one of these occasions, "you have such a steady aim? Why, boy, you haven't been at it very long. Your eye is like a hawk, by jingo!"

Mick scratched his head in father's way, puzzled to explain his keenness of vision.

"Faith, sor," he said at length, "it moost 'a bin tryin' to say if I could say any thin' good turn up afore I jined the sarvice, sure; whin me fayther wor a blissid Oitalian organ-grinder an' none of us had nothin' to ate, bedad!"

"By jingo!" exclaimed Mr Gadgett, smiling for once, for I never previously saw the slightest change of muscle on his thin, weather-beaten, grey-whiskered face, "you'll do!"

Before we came back again from this cruise, we had a bout of bad weather while knocking about in the Channel, which brought back to my mind the yarn Larrikins told the first evening I passed on board the *Saint Vincent*, in order to distract my attention while he was rigging up my hammock so that it would come down by the run—of seas that were 'mountings 'igh,' and winds that blew the 'air off 'is 'ead!'

I took at the time, it may be recollected, Master Larrikins' tale with a very good pinch of the proverbial salt, believing he only intended to 'pull my leg'; but when on the present occasion the brig began to labour heavily and the green seas, rolling over from the open sea beyond Ushant, the wind having come on to blow a regular stiff sou'-wester, topped our bulwarks and made a clean sweep of the deck, I thought possibly the old joker Larrikins, who had left the training-ship long ere this and was

serving as an ordinary seaman on a foreign station, might not have been 'stretching' to such an extent as I had at the time imagined.

The little brig, however, was a staunch sea boat, having braved much worse weather than we now experienced; and, being well handled by our commander, who was a sailor every inch of him, we ran before the gale round the easternmost end of the Isle of Wight and snugly brought up under the lee of Saint Helens, where we dropped both our anchors, remaining in this sheltered roadstead until the weather broke, when we returned to Portsmouth.

So far, everything had gone well with me since I entered on board the *Saint Vincent*, for I had never got into any trouble beyond a slight scrape or two; but tow the Fates, as if to condone the previous good fortune with which they had favoured me, all at once did me a very bad turn, getting me into sad disgrace.

Serious as the matter was, no doubt, in the eyes of the authorities, it was not, however, such a very terrible crime in itself, though it got me into the bad books of the captain, who had been so friendly disposed towards me that he often used to let me take his dog 'Gyp' for a walk when I went ashore.

The fact was, to confess my sin outright, I committed a breach of one of the strictest regulations of the training service.

I was caught smoking.

But, I had better tell you all about it from the first to the last, and then, you'll be able to judge for yourself of the heinousness of my offence.

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## **Chapter Eleven.**

### **I get into Disgrace.**

After that first cruise of mine in the little *Martin*, I was at home one Saturday afternoon, having had permission from the captain—being what they call 'a local boy,' my parents residing in Portsmouth—to remain ashore till Sunday evening at sunset. It was now summer-time, and I was sitting in our back garden, which was more extensive than might have been expected from



the surroundings of Bonfire Corner, the house, as I have said, being an old-fashioned one and father having bought the freehold for a mere song in the days when property in Portsea did not fetch such a high price as at present. The pink and white blossoms of the apple-trees, of which we had a tidy number round the garden, had dropped off long ere now and the fruit was beginning to form; but there were plenty of roses still out, and all sorts of old-fashioned flowers, filling the air with fragrance.

I was enjoying myself to rights under the shade of an ancient mulberry-tree, which must have been planted in the time of Queen Elizabeth I should think, judging by its gnarled trunk and huge twisted branches.

Some of these hung rather low, and Jenny had brought out Jack our thrush and suspended his cage along with those of our piping bullfinch and some of the canaries, just above a rustic table, having an old armchair that had seen its better days, in front of it, which was father's favourite seat when at home and the weather was not too bad to go out of doors.

Here was his pipe and tobacco-jar, just as he left them in the morning, it being his habit to take a whiff there after breakfast prior to shouldering his oars, which he always brought back to the cottage of a night for safety's sake, and starting off to his wherry for the day.

I felt rather lonesome, for Mick had not been able to get leave to come ashore with me, and Jenny was too busy helping mother house-cleaning to spare much time for a chat after the first greetings had passed on my arriving at the house; so, looking at father's pipe and tobacco-jar, the thought came into my head—probably suggested by that wily old Serpent, who, the parson says, is always on the watch to put evil thoughts into empty minds—"Why shouldn't I learn to smoke?"

I don't think I would have carried this thought into action had it not been for 'Ally Sloper,' our cockatoo, who just then came hopping down the garden-path from the scullery, where he had been having a rare carrying-on with the cat, the rum bird as soon as he caught sight of me flying up on the table and catching hold of the end of father's favourite churchwarden with his claw.

"Say-rah!" he shouted out in the very tones of father's voice, so that I could almost fancy he were there sitting alongside of me. "Blest if I don't have a pipe!"

That settled the matter.

The next moment I had taken the pipe from 'Ally Sloper's' reluctant claw; and, filling it carefully, poking down the tobacco with the end of my finger just as father used to do, I struck a match and started smoking.

I can't say I absolutely liked it at first, the strong narcotic, bitter taste of the tobacco, combined with the smell, making me feel rather giddy; while a gulp of smoke which went the wrong way caused me to cough.

But, I stuck at it all the same, feeling that now at last I was on the highroad to being a man, just like those able-bodied seamen belonging to our ship who used to enjoy 'blowing their cloud,' as they called it, of an evening on board the *Saint Vincent* when work was done for the day.

My complacency, too, was heightened by Jenny coming out presently, and the admiration she expressed at my dignified attitude under the mulberry-tree, leaning back in father's armchair, and smoking his very own churchwarden.

"Good gracious me, Tom!" she exclaimed; Jack the thrush calling out "Jenny! Jenny! Jenny!" at sight of her, as he always did. "Why, you're just like daddy!"

This made me feel proud, I can tell you; though old 'Ally Sloper' didn't appear to like my performance, for I was amusing myself by puffing the smoke in his face, making him put up his lemon crest and spread out his collar-like feathers, screaming for mother like mad.

I had 'crossed the Rubicon,' however; and, ever after this, when at home of an afternoon, sometimes with Mick, who, of course, imitated me, sometimes without him on those occasions when he did not get permission to go ashore, I used to have a whiff at father's pipe on the sly—without his knowledge though, you bet!

By this means, I soon became a regular smoker; and, content no longer with an occasional draw at father's churchwarden, I bought a fine briar-root pipe for myself out of my pocket-money, which was increased by my becoming a first-class boy now to a shilling a week.

This pipe I carried about with me, in company with an old brass tobacco-box I found in the mud one day at Point, stowed

carefully away with all my other portable gear in my cap, according to the custom of the service.

I got so bold at last, that even on board the training-ship I would take a stray whiff of a while, when I got into some snug corner on deck where I thought I would be unobserved; though my chum Mick, who didn't take kindly to the habit like myself, often cautioned me about the risk I ran in being caught.

"Faith, Tom, me bhoy," he would say to me, "Oi can't say howivver ye can go fur to do it, sure, a gossoon loike yersilf who's got a carrackter fur to loose; aye, an' fur sich a dirty, nasty thing as thit, a-spillin' the tasthe ov good ghrub, so thit ye can't tell whither ye're aitin' spuds or pay doo. Ef it wor a chap loike that 'Ugly' now, the sulky baste ez wouldn't hev a koind wurrd fur ye, loike a Christian, since ye saved his rascally loife last year, begorrah, Oi could say the sinse ov it; but, fur a chap loike yersilf, Tom, fur to do it, with ivverythin' to loose, Oi'm ashamed on ye!"

Mick's remonstrances, however, were all in vain; for, as mother frequently accused father of being, I was 'obstinate like all the Bowlings,' and once I had set my mind on a thing I'm sorry to say nothing would turn me from it.

The first time I was caught thus smoking on board against the rules, I was let off with only a caution; Mr Brown, the ship's corporal, who had always continued my friend, not bringing my offence to the notice of the authorities.

"Don't let it occur again, though, Tom Bowling," said he to me, with a pinch of the ear, on seeing me once having a whiff behind the windlass bitts; "for, let me tell you, if you're nabbed by me or any one else at it again, as I must inform the master-at-arms, though I know he won't let it go further now, you'll be brought up on the quarter-deck and receive punishment."

The ship's corporal's advice, however, went through one deaf ear and out of the other, like my chum's remonstrance; and one fine day I was 'brought up all standing' in the very act of committing the same offence.

Unfortunately for me, my captor on this occasion was a new corporal who had just been promoted to the police force of the ship, a young seaman whose good conduct had earned him the post, and who wished, of course, to show himself especially smart.

Unthinking of my approaching doom, I was smoking away one evening between the lights, never dreaming for a moment that any one was near or noticing me, when all at once a hand gripped the back of my neck and slewed my head round.

"Ha, my joker," cried Nemesis, in the shape of this young corporal, who I saw was surrounded by a small crowd of my grinning shipmates, "I've caught you this time!"

He had, with a vengeance; for not only had he seized me 'flagrante delicto,' as the captain said to me subsequently, he being a Latin scholar, the meaning of which was, I suppose, that I had the delicious fragrance of the 'baccy' about me, but Smithers, the corporal, wrenched the pipe that was the cause of all the mischief from my hand, as I hastily removed it from my mouth and attempted to conceal it.

He reported me in due course to 'Jimmy the One,' our first lieutenant, who in due course put me in the black list; and I was brought up the next day on the quarter-deck before the captain, when we all mustered for 'divisions' on the upper deck.

The commanding officer spoke to me kindly, saying he was sorry to see me in such a position; but, all the same, the offence being one which he said he could not possibly excuse, as he was determined to stop the pernicious habit of smoking, which, if indulged in by young boys, would ruin their constitutions for life, he sentenced me to have six strokes, the usual penalty.

Accordingly, 'the horse' kept for the purpose, a sort of rough and round wooden structure with four posts for legs, similar to those saddle-blocks seen in harness shops, was rigged, and one of the gunner's mates gave me the allotted number of administrations of the cane that I had earned.

The boys on board the *Saint Vincent* in their slang called this stroking business 'stroniky'; and they have a rude rhyme anent it, which embodies likewise what they catalogue as the hardships of the service—

"Pea doo and bolliky,  
Hard work and stroniky,  
Who wouldn't join the Navy!"

I bore my punishment unflinchingly, for, really I knew I deserved it; but, although the gunner's mate did not spare his

arm and the cuts he gave me with his cane stung sharply, sharper than the pain I felt physically was the consciousness that I had lost my good character!

My leave, too, was stopped, so that I did not get home for a month; not that I cared about this much, for, to tell the truth, I hardly liked to face father and Jenny till the recollection of my punishment had become somewhat deadened by time and the chaff of my messmates.

They did not attach the disgrace that I did to my experience of 'stroniky.'

On the contrary, many anecdotes were told anent it after turning in that evening, the time when we indulged in yarning amongst ourselves after 'lights out' was sounded, and all was darkness on the lower deck.

One story told was that of a young Scotchman, who, with the characteristic thoughtfulness of his race, while blubbering, and yelling out 'Mudder—Mudder—Mudder—Mudder!' throughout the operation, yet calculated accurately the duration of his ordeal, shouting in the most matter-of-fact voice when given the last stroke, 'That's sax!'

If not so particular as this Scotch lad in respect of numbering the strokes I received, their effect was much more lasting in my case; for, adopting Mick's advice rather late in the day, I threw overboard the remaining stock of tobacco and pipes I had stowed in my 'ditty box' below and abjured smoking so long as I remained in the training-ship, not resuming the habit until some years later when I was grown up and was on active service abroad.

My good character, too, returned to me after a time; and I may say, without boasting, I never lost it again while I remained on board the *Saint Vincent*, keeping steady and trying to do my duty through good report and ill until I left the ship.

A couple of months later on, also, I became also restored to the captain's favour in rather a funny fashion.

I was out in the *Martin* during her last cruise for the year, it having got to be late in the autumn, and approaching the time for her to be dismantled and lay up for the winter.

We had run down to Plymouth as usual, and were on our way back up Channel, beating against strong headwinds, when the

weather got thick, as on our former cruise, and it came on to blow pretty stiff, the sea getting up and the brig having such a bad time of it that it took four of us at the wheel, besides old Jellybelly the quarter-master, to keep her on her course.

As luck would have it, 'Gyp' the captain's dog had come with us for the trip, his master being away on leave, and the commander of the *Martin*, who had volunteered to take charge of him during the captain's absence, thinking it best to keep him under his own eye.

'Gyp' was very partial to me, as might be imagined from the fact of my having been so long in the habit of taking him ashore with me; and, consequently, during our cruise he attached himself with that strong bias for which his breed is proverbial to my humble self, preferring, when allowed the opportunity, to share my quarters even to enjoying the luxuries of the wardroom of the brig aft.

His keen eye ever watched my movements when on deck and a word or look from me was sufficient to set his stumpy tail wagging as if it would never stop; while he would lick my bare feet in a most affectionate manner should I ever pass near him and give him the chance, showing me his 'bad leg,' if the slightest hint to that effect were given, by holding up one of his hind limbs and stretching it out in a most extraordinary manner, the captain's valet having taught him this trick when he was a puppy and 'Gyp' never having forgotten it though he had arrived at maturer years.

Nor, likewise, had he forgotten the art of balancing a biscuit on his nose and not dropping it or offering in any way to masticate the same, however much his feelings might be inclined thereto, without the permissive order, 'Now you may have it,' being uttered.

'Gyp,' I am afraid, was not a born sailor like myself and family.

No ancestral fox-terrier of his race could possibly, I fancy, have 'gone aloft' like the original head of our house; for, though he liked being at sea well enough in fine weather, he got in the dumps when it came on to blow, his apology for a tail becoming so limp that what there was of it drooped and lost its wag, so, that being left in the lurch through his rudder not answering the helm, he stumbled about the deck like any young Johnny Raw just come afloat.

Rolling and labouring, heeling over gunwales under sometimes, the *Martin* managed to reach Spithead in the teeth of a stormy south-easter, which was sending the surf over Southsea Castle as the big rollers coming in from the offing broke against the pile-protected rampart below; and, we were just going to anchor in our usual berth under the lee of the Spit, 'Gyp' standing as well as he could with his rickety sea-legs by the taffrail.

He was watching me coming down from aloft, where I had gone with some of the other boys of the starboard watch to furl the mizzen-topsail, waiting, poor fellow, to greet me with a sniff of welcome; when, in the excitement of my near approach, he wagged his tail somewhat incautiously and, thereby losing his footing, the affectionate animal fell overboard.

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## **Chapter Twelve.**

### **"Drafted."**

Shouting out without thinking as loud as I could, "Man overboard!" I plunged into the tideway after him; and, before 'Gyp' knew where he was or had time to shake the water out of his eyes and ears after rising from his unexpected plunge, breasting the choppy seas with his quick-working paws and paddling all round in a circle in his flurry, I had struck out after him, gripping him by the collar in half a dozen strokes.

Poor old chap, he whined and licked my face as I came alongside him, his wistful eyes saying as plainly as dog could speak, "Thank God, Tom, you've come to help me," or something to that effect.

I was a good swimmer, having won the long-distance prize in our summer sports off Haslar Creek; but, I now found the task of battling with the big billows brought in by the south-easter, which were all the rougher from the cross tide setting against them, none too easy, wind and sea-going one way and the tide another.

I could hardly make a stroke towards the beach, which I aimed for at first, the undercurrent pulling me back and sweeping me out seaward; while, the rough water, smacking against my face, bothered me and palsied my every effort.

They had let go the life-buoy, of course, on board the brig when I sang out before jumping off from the taffrail; but the buoy was more difficult to reach than the shore, the wind catching it up and tossing it from wave crest to wave crest till it was cast up on top of one of the piles in front of the Castle far ahead.

Treading water to regain my breath after a futile struggle of some minutes' duration, and holding poor 'Gyp's' head well up so that he should not be drowned by the spent seas that broke against us, I squinted round to see what they were doing on board the *Martin* in the way of trying to pick us up.

A boat, I saw, was being lowered to leeward; but, the brig was such a long way off now that I was afraid they wouldn't be in time to save us.

I must look for assistance in another direction.

In an instant, an old yarn of father's came back to my mind, one wherein he used to tell of having once been run down by a steamer when out trawling and having had to pass the night within the Spit Buoy.

Why, I must be close on it now!

Yes, that was the sound of the bell hung from within the cage-like framework surrounding the buoy, which is moored on the edge of the shoal skirting the fairway leading into Portsmouth Harbour.

The broken water was rocking it to and fro; and, with every lurch the buoy made, this bell gave out a doleful knell as if ringing away the passing soul of some dead sailor gone to his last account.

Perchance it was tolling for 'Gyp' and me!

This thought flashed through me for a second; but the next second I dismissed it as a craven fear, my courage returning to me.

I set my teeth, determined to fight it out to the end, when, if need be, I should die bravely.

"Hurrah, 'Gyp,' whilst there's life there's hope!" I shouted, as much to encourage the poor dog as myself, turning on my side and cuddling him well up on my chest with my right arm to keep his head out of the water, while I struck out with all my



strength with my left towards the buoy, now within a stone's throw, the tide gradually sweeping us near it in spite of the wind and sea. "There's no reason why the Spit Buoy shouldn't rescue us, the same as it did father!"

I believe 'Gyp' understood what I said, for I declare I felt his little stump tail wag against my arm, and he licked my cheek that was nearest, being otherwise too exhausted to give expression to his emotion by bark or whine.

We did it too.

After a stiff swim, though but such a short distance, I clutched hold of a becket attached to the side of the buoy; and then, drawing myself up out of the water, I landed 'Gyp' inside our refuge, climbing in after him myself.

The lifeboat from the *Martin*, which was manned by four stout seamen, the commander himself coming in her as coxswain, meanwhile was making for us, the course of the cutter being directed by signals from the brig, where the signalman on duty had probably kept his glass on me from the moment I jumped overboard and rose to the surface; and, presently, after a long pull and a hard one too, the boat came up to the buoy and took us off.

'By the Lord Harry!' as father used to exclaim sometimes when he was excited, you should have only heard the cheer that greeted us when the cutter got back to the brig, which had now dropped her anchor; the boys and older hands also, who were just on their way down from aloft after furling the sails, manning the rigging, and giving out a wild and hearty 'Hooray' that might have been heard in the dockyard.

The commander complimented me on the quarter-deck, saying that my action was a plucky one to jump overboard as I did, whether to save man or dog; and then ordering the steward to fetch me a stiff glass of hot brandy-and-water, he told me to go below and turn in to my hammock.

'Gyp,' however, would not leave me; and, as he insisted on joining company with me in my hammock, I made him go shares with the brandy-and-water as well, though I can't say that he took his portion with as much satisfaction.

His master, on coming to hear of the occurrence when he returned from leave, was, I need hardly say, delighted that 'Gyp' had been saved from a watery grave.

He extolled, indeed, my really unpremeditated action in much higher terms than it actually deserved; for, really, I did it, as I have said before, without thinking.

However, be that as it may, the captain, commending me on my good conduct generally since I had been attached to the training-ship under his command, passed over in the most honourable way that unfortunate smoking episode of mine, and promised to 'keep his eye on me.'

This, I may add, he did in a much more satisfactory manner than that smart chap, ship's corporal Smithers; but, of this, you will learn anon.

My days in the *Saint Vincent*, you must know, were now drawing to a close.

Nine months of second-class boy instruction and four months as a first-class boy had pretty well taken me through the ordinary routine of the training-ship; the last two months of my stay on board being mainly devoted to a *résumé* of the various studies constituting seamanship which I had already gone through, as well as a grand rehearsal of gun practice and rifle drill and of the sword exercise.

In this latter all the boys took the keenest delight, cutting and slashing at one another with a go and gusto worthy of all admiration.

We pointed, guarded, and parried, with a nimbleness and correctness that excited the praise of our instructor; but when we got to what was called 'general practice,' and learnt cuts 'One' and 'Two,' with an extra 'Point,' before our teacher sang out 'Guard!' our enthusiasm knew no bounds, and all of us would fancy ourselves to be bluejackets in action, boarding a pirate or leading a storming-party and killing hecatombs of enemies on the war-path, our weapons mowing them down with every sweep!

Sometimes our sword-play got us into scrapes, when two boys matched against each other by the instructor allowed their zeal to overcome their discretion; for, occasionally, they would lose their tempers when over the single-sticks and give one another such spiteful blows that the instructor would have to interfere and separate them by force of arms.

In the majority of cases, however, the scratches we received were more the result of accident than of malice intent; and the

little embroilments that happened when sword-play degenerated into horseplay were not, as a rule, worth mentioning.

On one occasion, though, my chum Mick nearly had his nose carved off in an encounter with a comrade, though luckily his opponent did not succeed in spoiling Mick's beauty.

This would have been a pity; for, really, he was a very good-looking chap, and I am sure my sister Jenny, though she wouldn't confess it, would have been sorry if anything had occurred to mar his comely face.

It happened thus. When skylarking together on the upper deck one evening, Mick and another fellow caught up a couple of cutlasses that had been left inadvertently lying about the deck, and they commenced pointing and cutting and slashing at one another with the keen-edged weapons, just as if they had been mere basket-hilted single-sticks, a rap from which would have done no damage beyond a bruise.

They were going it in fine style, when all at once Mick's foot slipped; and, missing his guard as his opponent made a vicious cut 'one' at him, he received this on his chest, the cutlass cutting through his jumper and flannel and making a slight wound across his breastbone.

Had his head not been thrown backwards as he slipped, poor Mick would have had the most striking feature of his merry countenance sliced off as dexterously as if it had been a carrot!

The last seven weeks of my experiences of the old ship, which I had begun to look upon as much my home as the little cottage at Bonfire Corner, were devoted to practice with the big guns that are used in modern ships of war; and these, I may add, are so unlike the old twenty-four and thirty-two and sixty-four pounders that had been used in our early training, that any drill with them would have failed to have been of much assistance to us in getting the cross-cannon badge on our sleeve.

So, for these seven weeks, all of us first-class boys who were near the end of our term had to go to the *Excellent* every day to go through a course of gunnery; and were sent out to sea in sections in the *Blazer* or *Handy*, or some other gunboat attached to the gunnery school, so as to gain some sort of preliminary insight into the ways of the big breech-loading guns used in the armour-clads of to-day, as well as being made

acquainted with their lesser satellites quick-firing and machine-guns.

We did not leave our old ship altogether yet, though; for we used to take our dinners with us when we went away from her of a morning, returning back to the *Saint Vincent* of a night to sleep, when we would retail all of our experiences to our comrades who had remained behind.

At last the day came, a day I shall remember all my life, when Mick and I, for we both went away together even as we had joined on the same day, left the *Saint Vincent* for good and all.

One forenoon, just before 'cooks to their messes' sounded, and prior to our dispersing after the usual assembly for 'divisions' on the upper deck, the captain ordered Mick and myself, with some half a dozen other first-class boys belonging to the starboard watch and a like number from the port, to step out of the ranks; when, telling us we were drafted to the guardship for service with the fleet, he addressed a few kindly words of advice to us as to our future conduct and then dismissed us to our dinner, telling us we were to pack up our gear and leave the ship early in the afternoon.

He sent for me soon after I had disposed of the 'two spuds and a Jonah,' which composed the meal of the day, and on my going to his cabin he spoke to me very nicely, saying that I might write to him should I ever need help in getting on in the service, and that he would always, as he had previously promised, 'keep an eye on me'!

"Faith," said Mick, on my telling him this, "it'll be moighty onplisint fur ye, Tom, me bhoy; thet gimblet oye ov his sames to go roight thro' an' thro' me, begorrah, if he ivver onst looks at me sure!"

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## **Chapter Thirteen.**

### **I go to Sea.**

I did not mind Mick's chaff, though. The captain had been a good friend to me while I had been on board, and I parted with him with as much regret as I felt when I said 'good-bye' to 'Gyp.'

Our meal that day was what we called aboard ship a 'stamp and go,' all of us who were drafted being too excited to think much of eating—all of us, that is, excepting Mick!

He, as I have mentioned more than once previously, was a chap who was particularly partial to his grub, this being probably owing to the circumstance that he had experienced hard fare in his earlier days before he joined the *Saint Vincent*; but I can answer for this, that he endeavoured to the best of his ability, after that period, to make up for any shortcomings he had suffered from before!

"Begorrah, Tom," he answered me very philosophically, when I told him to hurry up, "ther's no knowin' whin, sure, ayther on us'll git another good square male; an', faith, the bo'sun towld me onst no will-app'inted shep ivver goes to say widout havin' her proper regulation stores an' purvisions aboard!"

This was after I had my interview with the captain, of course; and I only tell it to show what sort of a fellow my chum was.

When we had packed our bags and come up on the middle deck to leave the ship in one of the cutters, which was to land us at the King's Stairs in the dockyard, the master-at-arms, who stood by the entry-port with Mr Brown the ship's corporal, wished us both a cordial farewell.

"Now, keep your hair on straight, Tom Bowling," said the former to me, giving me a good grip of his fist, for he was a very hearty sort of man. "I have had my eye on you while you have been aboard here; and I quite believe you'll turn out the right sort and work your way up to your warrant, if you only keep straight, long before I am laid on the shelf, my boy!"

"Faith, Tom," whispered Mick to me in an aside that was quite loud enough for the 'Jaunty' to catch his remark, "ivverybody, sure, 's kapin' ther' oye on ye; an' ef all the jokers go on loike thet, ye'll be havin' what ye're mooother called t'other day, bedad, a' 'tack ov 'oye-strikes,' if ye don't look out sharp!"

"Ah, my h'Italian friend!" said the master-at-arms, who overheard him, with a broad grin on his face, which was reflected on that of Mr Brown; "so you're going to leave us too, eh! Well, as some writing chap says somewhere or t'other in some book I've read, we could have better spared a better boy than you, Paddy. You've been a good lad too, in spite of your larks; and I hope you'll get on well in the service, like your

chum Tom Bowling here. Stick to him, and he'll keep you straight."

So saying, he shook hands with Mick the same as he had done with me, Mr Brown following suit in an equally hearty fashion; and shouldering our bags, we all went down the accommodation ladder and took our seats in the cutter.

Just as we were shoving off, Mick spied old Jellybelly on duty at the gangway, and he could not help giving him a parting shot.

"Good luck to ye, Mr Tarbolt, an' more power to yer elber, sor," he cried out with much effusion. "Be jabbers, Oi'll kape me oye out fur to say ef Oi can pick up a roight-down comfable arm-cheer fur ye to take a sate whin ye gits toired, sure, a-standin' whin ye're on the watch!"

There was a subdued titter from all the other fellows, both them in the boat and the rest who were out on the booms and standing by the entry-port, and old Jellybelly shook his fist in a threatening manner at Mick; but the smile on his face showed that he took the old joke in good part.

The last I saw of the old ship as we rowed away up the harbour was a row of grinning faces looking in our direction, and the lines being triced up fore and aft with the hammock-cloths and clothes of the boys hung out to dry, Tuesday, the day we left, being 'washing-day' with us on board.

I had experienced a happy time altogether on board her; and, when I come to look back now, the wonder to me, I'm sure, is that every boy who can possibly get permission from his people does not join the service, considering all the advantages he gets on donning the bluejacket rig.

Just consider.

Instead of living higgledy-piggledy in some close room with half a dozen others, as many poor boys have to do, and little or nothing to eat and that only at haphazard, while in the majority of cases his clothing will be none of the best, being more holey than pious; the same boy on entering the *Saint Vincent* finds himself at once well fed, well clothed, and with clean and roomy quarters to breathe in!

There is the discipline, to be sure, and that's where the shoe pinches with the free Arab of the slums; but, in addition to the discipline, it should be recollected there is also the instruction in

various things that nine boys out of ten look upon rather as pleasurable games than so many tasks.

Besides this, they have real games in their play-hours aboard and in the recreation-ground at Haslar; and, besides, are allowed ashore once a week at least, to see their friends and relatives, if these live in the neighbourhood, having pocket-money given them to enjoy themselves with—more than they can say they ever had in their life on land.

Then there are the 'sports' which the *Saint Vincent* boys have every year at midsummer, before the breaking-up for their holidays, when swimming races, boat races, egg-and-spoon races, and all sorts of jollities are all the go.

But, there I am again, hauling my jawing tackle aboard according to the old Bowling family propensity, anent which mother used always to rate father; so, I must belay!

Pulling steadily away from the old ship on the stream which was running up the harbour, making this appear one vast lake up to Fareham Creek under the base of the Portsdown hills, a lake whereon floated long lines of old hulks of the past, interspersed with many a specimen of the newer models of the present ships of the Navy, the cutter at last landed us at the foot of the King's Stairs; when, unshipping our bags and shouldering them again, we crossed the dockyard in single file, under charge of a petty officer, making for the guardship to which we had been drafted, which was lying alongside the North Wall, not far from the *Excellent*.

Our tramp was a most fatiguing one over the rough pigs of iron ballast arranged like cobble-stones, which some chap must have had put down in order to benefit his bootmaker, the pilgrimage of folk anxious to see the yard being rather trying on shoe-leather.

We felt it all the more from having been accustomed to go in our bare feet on board the training-ship, and boots in themselves being irksome, without the hard road we had to travel adding to the penance.

Ascending the ladder-way that led up from the jetty to the deck of the old *Asia*, the guardship, we were soon allotted our billets; and quickly settled down to the routine of the ship, which, of course, was very different to that of the *Saint Vincent*.

However, we did not very long remain here; for, it being now getting on well in the month of July, and several new ships having been ordered to be commissioned for the Naval Manoeuvres, Mick and I, good luck still attending us and keeping us always in company, were told off to join a smart cruiser attached to one of the squadrons, in which we presently sailed for Bantry Bay.

Here my chum found himself once more in his native land, and under a sky as blue as that of Italy, to which country he had originally claimed to belong, in spite of the strong 'brogue' that readily betrayed his kinship to the inhabitants when we went ashore at Glengariff.

Mick's complaint now was that he could not find any one rejoicing in his name; for every one he and I met, strolling along from Castletown to Waterfall, the landing-place at the foot of Hungry Mountain, half round the bay, was either a Sullivan or an O'Brien—not a single Donovan being to be met with for love or money.

"Begorrah, I can't make it out at all, at all!" said my chum to me, after making inquiries at the various little shebeens on our way and chatting almost with every one of the groups of country people we passed, who all seemed mightily pleased at the sight of us bluejackets, most of them offering us hospitality in the shape of cups of milk at the corner of nearly every country lane, where some pretty colleen would stand, clad in her picturesque red cape and with stockingless feet, wishful to give thirsty folk a drink. "Me fayther s'id, faith, as how the Donovans wor kings ov Cark at one toime, Tom!"

"Why," I rejoined, giving him a twister, "you told the 'Jaunty' when you came aboard the *Saint Vincent* that time to join, that your father was an 'Oitalian!'"

"Stow thet, Tom," said he with a grin, digging me in the ribs, much to the amusement of one of the Irish girls who was near us, at whom Mick winked. "Sure, thet wor ownly me joke. Th'room pogue, ma colleen ogue?"

The girl near, to whom he addressed the latter part of his speech, which sounded like Greek to me, blushed and laughed, turning away shyly.

"Hullo!" I exclaimed. "What does that mean, Mick?"



"Faith, it manes 'Give me a kiss, me purty gurl,' Tom," he answered, bursting into a roar of laughter. "It's a quishton ye'll foind moighty convanient to axe some-toimes whin ye're in these parts, mabouchal; an' Oi'd advise ye to larn the languish ez soon ez ye can."

We remained at Bantry, coaling and preparing for action, for about a week, at the end of which time, 'war' being declared between the rival fleets engaged in the Manoeuvres, we filed out of the bay in single column line ahead and started off for the fray; the fleet I was with having some exciting episodes in the chops of the Channel during the time the mimic campaign lasted, in chasing and capturing the ships of the 'enemy,' our cruiser being a very fast vessel and easily able to overhaul most of their craft hand over hand.

It was good fun too—almost like real fighting; and we got so eager at the game, that, on one occasion when we put into Plymouth Sound and found one of the ships belonging to the other side there, our fellows nearly had a row with the men belonging to her.

This shows how very thoroughly we entered into the sport.

It was the end of August when we came back from the Manoeuvres; and by the time we had paid off the cruiser, which, with the other ships specially commissioned for the purpose, was relegated to the reserve basin until she should be wanted to relieve some other vessel abroad, more than another month had elapsed before our rejoining the guardship.

But no sooner had we done this than we had to make another move.

The Training Squadron was under refit for its winter cruise, and a number of boys being required to fill up the complements of the ships composing it, one fine morning, just when Mick and myself began to feel at home again on board the old *Asia*, we were paraded on deck with a number of others and 'told off' to join the *Active*.

She was the commodore's ship of the squadron, and the very one we had longed to be appointed to, her commander being a smart seaman well known in the service, and a friend of father's old friend Captain Mordaunt.

The latter, as luck would have it, had come to see us the previous Sunday, when I happened to be home and had

promised me to put in a good word for me in the event of my being appointed to the ship.

By a strange coincidence, Mick and I had been that very day talking of this while we were engaged cleaning some rusty rifles on the main-deck, which job one of the petty officers had put us at, from his seeing my chum and me star-gazing about, with nothing to do.

"Be jabbers!" said Mick, sighting his rifle and pretending to take aim at the swab as he went off after imposing this extra task on us, though he waited until the officious gentleman's back was turned, as may be taken for granted, "Oi wud loike to spot thet chap roight in the bull's-eye, bad cess to him! Och, but wait till we're aboard the *Active*, Tom, an', sure, we'll hev no more of straight-backed jokers loike him to dale with!"

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched, Mick," said I. "We're not appointed to her yet."

"Blatheration!" exclaimed my chum, smacking the butt of his rifle on the deck and making the petty officer who was on the other side of the hatchway jump round in a jiffy, looking marline-spikes in our direction. "Ye jist say, now, if we don't join her! Sure, I dramed ov her last noight, alannah. Oi'd dropped off into a swate shlope afther thet chap made sich a row toomblin' out ov his hammick thet wor next moine, bein' three sheets an' more, faith, in the woind whin he come off from shore; an' I dramed ez how, Tom, we two wor aboard the *Active*, which Oi wor lookin' over ounly yisterday whin Oi come by Pitch-House Jetty, where she's lyin' preparin' for say. Yis, we wor aboard her roight enuf; an' Oi heerd the bo'sun poipe to 'make sail,' an' the order guv 'way aloft, lay out on the yards an' loose tops'ls. Thin Oi thinks ez how Oi'm ashore, ez will ez aboard; an' Oi says the *Active* a-sailin' out o' harbour, ez nate ez ye plaize wid all her upper sails an' flyin' jib, an' fore-topmast stays'l set!"

"I don't think you're likely to see that, Mick," said I, laughing. "It may do well enough in a dream; but I've heard father say that no ship has ever worked out of harbour under sail alone for the last forty years or more!"

"Begorrah, just ye wait an' say," rejoined he. "Oi hed a paice ov shamrock, which I tuk out ov the fairy ring, sure, at Glasnevin, under me hid last noight whin Oi wor shlapin', an' me drame's bound fur to come thrue!"

Strangely enough, so it turned out, too.

A week after we joined her, all things being ready and her preparation for sea being complete, the *Active* cast off the hawsers mooring her to the bollards on the jetty; and then, disdaining the assistance of any of the harbour tugs, the commodore sent the men aloft to make sail, and took her out to Spithead under her canvas alone, conning the ship himself from his station aft.

I may say I assisted at the operation, being one of the hands who went aloft to set the mizzen-royal; and, I may add, that father told me when I came home on the termination of our cruise, at the end of the ensuing spring, our exploit was the talk of the town for months afterwards!

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## Chapter Fourteen.

### "In the Bay of Biscay, O!"

"Tom," said Mick to me, when we came down from the yards, by which time the ship was abreast of Southsea Pier on her way out in the fairway, "Oi'm afther settin' oop, faith, fur a conjirer, now me drame's coom roight!"

"You're more than a conjurer, Mick," I replied to this, laughing. "You're a prophet!"

"Begorrah!" he rejoined with his usual grin, "it ain't mooch profit Oi'll git oot ov it, me darlint, or yersilf ayther, fur thet matther—about ez mooch, faith, ez Pat O'Connor got whin he shaved his pig!"

The squadron remained but a couple of days at anchor at Spithead; proceeding thence to Portland, whence, the *Calypso* and *Ruby*, ships belonging to the eastern division, having joined us, we all set sail in company for our cruise, bound for the West Indies.

Passing down Channel, through those 'chops' which our late cruiser had so watchfully guarded during the Manoeuvres, we gave Ushant a wide berth and entered the celebrated Bay of Biscay; the subject of a song as popular with us sailors as that of which my great-great-great-ancestor, Tom Bowling of pious and historic memory, was the hero.

Now, at last, I could say that I really was at sea!

A good many of my shipmates had no necessity, however, to do this; for they *felt* it—especially crossing the Bay!

The weather was dirty, as it usually is in this region.

This occurs through the influence of the Gulf Stream, which, after being wooed by the incurving and more hospitable coast of France, suddenly finds itself violently repulsed by the projecting Spanish peninsula; when, naturally angry, the current, like some folk who, on their not being able to vent their spleen on the people who may offend them, 'pass it on' to the nearest, tries to 'make it warm' for such unfortunate mariners as may cross its turbid bosom!

It is always rough there, and the winds as uncertain as a lady's smile; and, I may say that on this occasion both Boreas and Neptune seemed to have arranged to render our passage over this special broken-water domain of theirs as disagreeable as possible.

We were well handled, our commanding officer being, as I have already said, one of the smartest sailors in the service; but, notwithstanding this, the *Active* had very bad weather of it, while those of our consorts whom we could see in the distance appeared to experience worse.

The ship plunged and rolled to such an extent that it was almost impossible to go up and down the hatchways carrying anything; for a chap wanted more hands than he possessed to hold on with, let alone dunnage!

We boys had, as might be expected, most of the dirty work to do; and it was our task, when dinner was finished below, to help clear up the messes, and take the 'gashing-tubs,' in which the refuse of all our meals was thrown, up above to the upper deck and pitch the contents over the side, it being impossible for us to open any of the ports on the lower deck, from the heavy rolling seas that came toppling inboard every now and again.

The job was not a nice one, nor an easy one either; and the second day we were knocking about in the Bay an accident happened while we were at it that nearly settled the hash of one of us, making him more fit to go into the 'gashing-tub' himself than to handle it!

Four of us were trying to hoist our burden up the slippery ladder, which was rendered all the more slippery by the water washing down in a cataract every time a roller came over the forecastle and filled the waist of the corvette; not to speak of the rolling of the ship from port to starboard, and from starboard to port, varied by an occasional lift up in mid-air atop of some huge billow, and a dive down the next moment into the hollow of the waves, as if we were going down to Davy Jones's locker.

Mick, who was the leading member of our quartet, on the top step of the ladder, was holding on like grim death to the side-rope with one hand, and stretching out the other towards Finlayson, a new boy whom we had not seen before till we joined the *Active*, he having been drafted from the *Boscawen* at Portland; and who, in turn, had hold of the tub and was clutching Mick's hand to steady himself.

"Pull away, ye divvle!" cried Mick. "One more stip, begorrah, an' we'll be landid on the dick!"

"Shove up, you fellers below there!" shouted Finlayson, in response to this, to myself and another boy who had come forwards from the after part of the mess-deck to our assistance, but whose face I had not seen, from the fact of my back being turned to him. "Shove up, can't you! This chap atop here an' me is bearin' all the weight on it!"

"That's all very well," I growled, for the tub was slipping back on me, though I was holding it with both hands and shoving my knees into the steps of the ladder to keep myself steady. "Pull away, you beggar, your self! Aye, and you too, Mick, aloft there! I shall tumble back if you don't take the weight of the tub off me!"

"Begorrah, Tom, me hearty, ye shan't git kilt wid that there gashing-tub!" cried Mick, squinting down the hatchway and seeing my predicament. "Pull away, ye young divvle—it's you, ye new boy, I'm afther manin'—pull away wid a will! Tom, why, sure, don't ye make thet chap alongside ye put his shoulder to it properly? He ain't workin' at all, at all, bad cess to him, who ivver he is, fur I can't say him at all, at all!"

"Whoi, I be a-shuvvin' and a-shuvvin' all the time," rejoined a voice whose accents were strangely familiar to me. "You pull yerself, maister, and stop hollerin' at Oi!"

I turned; and there, much to my astonishment, at the foot of the ladder was 'Ugly,' of whose being on board the same ship I was ignorant up to that moment, he being in the starboard watch and I in the port, and the necessities of the service not having brought us together before, though how I'd never seen him even casually at Portsmouth or at Portland I can't account for.

Unfortunately, the curiosity that made me turn round brought about the mishap to which I have alluded, nearly making Tom Bowling, junior, your present informant, lose the number of his mess.

'Ugly,' as much surprised as myself at our strange meeting, started back on seeing me.

He had really, in spite of all that Mick said, been doing his part to assist me; and now, from his loosing his hold of the tub, which he had been trying to shove upwards on the one side the same as I did on the other, while the other two fellows above us pulled, the beastly thing came sliding back a step on me; and, as I was not holding on to anything, and the ship lurched at the moment, making Mick and Finlayson both let go at the same time, I tumbled incontinently backwards on to the lower deck, with the gashing-tub on top of me!

My good providence, however, still watched over me; for, as I fell, a big wave, coming splosh right over the side into the waist, poured down bodily through the hatchway, floating away the tub and flooding the lower deck.

This probably saved my life, as had the heavy tub fallen really on top of me I should have been squashed into a jelly.

"Faith, I belave ye've ez many loives ez a cat," cried Mick, making little, in proper sailor fashion, of my peril; and then, dropping his voice so that the others shouldn't hear him, he added, "Whisht, Tom—faith it's thet nasty baste 'Ugly' thet done it; an', sure, he's done it a-purpos!"

"No, Mick, I don't believe that," I whispered, in my turn, picking myself up with the aid of my suspicious chum, who proceeded to help me in clearing away the remains of the garbage from the tub which had been emptied into my jumper. "The fellow started back at sight of me, and I don't think he meant to leave go of the gashing-tub as he did."

"Begorrah!" cried Mick indignantly, "why didn't he stop and say so loike a man, insted ov snakin' away loike a cur?"

I cast my eyes about me and saw, truly enough, that 'Ugly' had disappeared.

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## **Chapter Fifteen.**

### **Comedy to Tragedy.**

"Hullo, my lads! This won't do, this won't do!" shouted out a petty officer just then, as he came tacking about the deck and trying to make a straight course for the hatchway. "There'd be a fine row if Number One came along here and saw that theer mess on the deck!"

"Faith, we couldn't hilp it, row or no row," said Mick, whose temper was a little bit heated from the recollection of 'Ugly's' conduct, and the fright he really had experienced on my account in spite of his trying to treat it as a joke. "Sure, sor, the toob toombed down atop ov this poor bhoy here, an' a'most made gammy duff ov him!"

"Well, well, p'raps y'll have better luck next time," replied the man jokingly; and, turning to me, he said in a kindly way, "A miss is as good as a mile, my lad; but, accident or no accident, you'll have to clear up that mess there, or there'll be ructions aboard, I can tell you!"

"All roight, sor," said Mick, as he clutched hold of a swab which we had brought with us, in case of such an emergency. "Oi'll make it roight, sure, in a brace ov shakes, sor."

I, too, bore a hand with another swab, as did Finlayson; and we soon made the place all shipshape again, another wave, which washed down the hatchway when we had finished, putting a polish on our work.

Nothing further was seen of 'Ugly,' however, either by Mick or myself, the ill-tempered brute evidently keeping out of our way; and it was not till late in the afternoon that I saw him again aft, when both watches were called to treble-reef the topsails, and we boys belonging to the ship had to go aloft to take in the mizzen.

We had not weathered Finisterre yet, though we had been bucketing about in the Bay now for over three days; the wind, which had been blowing in strong squalls from the north'ard and west'ard, suddenly backing to the south-east and coming on to blow harder than ever.

The sea got up also in a corresponding degree, its huge billows, as they rolled onward propelled by the gale, rearing themselves up in mid-air till they seemed sometimes to be level with the top of our mainmast, surpassing in height even those which my old friend Larrikins had described as 'mountings 'igh.'

I had seen already in my trips in the *Martin* up and down Channel what I fancied at the time to be rough weather; but, never in my life previously had I ever seen such a scene of grandeur as the ocean presented that stormy afternoon!

Far and wide, it seethed and boiled like a huge cauldron, its surface covered with foam as white as snow, which the dark setting of inky clouds along the horizon brought out in whiter relief.

Above, masses of ragged wrack scudded aimlessly across the sky, whose leaden hue was cheerless and grim, save where, in the west, the sun went down suddenly in a wrath of crimson majesty, the darkness of night descending on the scene as if a curtain of *crêpe*, had been let down the moment after he vanished beneath the waste of angry waters, unlightened by a single ray of his customary after-glow.

Apparently the tempest-loving demons of the deep were only waiting for the shades of night in order to carry on their revels with the greater 'go' at our expense; for no sooner had the evening closed in than the gale increased in force, and the sea waxed even angrier, so that by Four Bells in the first watch, that is at ten o'clock, in landsman's parlance, the ship had to lie-to under storm staysails—pitching and plunging bows under, and taking in some of the huge rollers occasionally over her forecastle, that swept down into the waist to such an extent that it was as much as the scuppers could do to get rid of the water as she rolled.

Fortunately, we did not get any of this below, the hatches having been battened down early in the afternoon, subsequently to our mishap with the 'gashing-tub'; but, although this saved us some wet, it was far from pleasant on our mess-deck, the steam from the wet clothes of the fellows belonging to the watch just relieved, and the smell of the bilge



from the place being shut up, making it resemble towards morning something like what I have read of an African slaver's hold being in the middle latitudes.

When day broke, I found, on turning out of my hammock, our ship riding a little easier, the rolling having abated considerably; and, on going on deck shortly afterwards, though there was no order as usual to 'lash up and stow,' the weather being too rough for that, the reason for this change for the better, so far as the uneasy motion was concerned, became apparent enough.

The commodore had ordered a storm jib to be set, as well as the after-trysail, which was about the size of a good old-fashioned pocket-handkerchief; and, instead of laying-to as we had been when I turned in close on midnight, the ship was now running before the south-easter and making good progress, too, out of the neighbourhood of the treacherous Bay.

By breakfast-time we were making so much better weather of it that we were able to open the hatches, and the windsails were rigged up to let down some fresh air below, which enabled us to have a better meal than we expected; so our hot cocoa and bread possessed an additional relish, not only from this circumstance, but also from the fact of our not having enjoyed anything hot since the previous day at dinner, the galley fires having been swamped out just before tea-time, thus forcing us to turn in supperless.

Later on, as the gale slackened, we set our topsails close-reefed, and more 'fore-and-aft' sail; and, when the sun had got above our foreyard, the commodore ordered the topgallant-masts to be sent up, these having been housed when it came on to blow heavily. Our topgallants were consequently set above our close-reefed topsails, which some of the young seamen on board appeared to think a most extraordinary proceeding; but one of the quarter-masters, who was an old hand, said he had often seen it done when sailing "under old Fitzroy on the Pacific station," when their ship would be bowling along under this sail before a stiff nor'-easter, in the run down from Vancouver to Callao, past the inhospitable Californian coast.

At noon that day, the navigating officer, who took the sun on the poop, surrounded by a lot of the young midshipmen we had on board for instruction during the training cruise, like us boys on the lower deck each in our respective billet, gave out that we were in latitude 44 degrees 10 minutes north, and longitude 10 degrees 15 minutes west, thus showing that we were well to the

westward of the ill-omened Cape Finisterre and now safely out of the Bay of Biscay!

The navigator also told our commanding officer, in the usual stereotyped nautical formula, that it was twelve o'clock.

"All right," replied the commodore. "Make it so!"

Accordingly, the sentry on the forecastle struck Eight Bells, and the men were piped down to dinner; the boatswain's mates sounding their shrill calls through the ship as the echo of the last stroke of the clapper on the side of the ship's bell ceased to reverberate in the noisy air, which was filled with the creaking of the blocks aloft and the hum of the wind, the sea breaking against our counter alongside in a sullen fashion as if old Neptune were disappointed at letting us slip out of his clutches!

At One Bell, half-an-hour later, when the grog was served out to the men—we boys, of course, having none of this, nor wanting it either—a rather amusing incident occurred.

Some of the chaps on board, though passed for ordinary seamen, were 'green hands'; and the older sailors that leavened the company, used to crack jokes on these and 'pull their legs' pretty considerably, until the green ones got too knowing to be taken in.

One fellow we had with us in the starboard watch, however, seemed to be so naturally 'raw' that nothing served to 'salt' him; and he was the butt not only of his own mess, but of the whole ship's company.

On this occasion Harris, a leading seaman, took a fine rise out of him.

"Say, Joblins," he called out, as he was going to light his pipe to have a smoke forwards, we boys having set out the spittoons for the men along the 'tween decks,' "got your grog all right, old ship?"

"Oh ay," answered the other. "I'se droonk un."

"But I means yer second 'lowance."

"Hay?" said Mr Johnny Raw, his eyes beginning to visibly brighten. "What fur be that?"

"Yer second 'lowance," repeated the joker Harris. "All the noo hands can git it if they axes fur it."

"Now, yer bean't a-joking?"

"No," declared Harris unblushingly, winking to the others around. "Joking—why should I, man?"

The greenhorn grew quite excited at the prospect of another tot of grog after his pipe.

"Say, shipmate," said he, rising from the bench at the mess-table where he had been sitting having a whiff, "tell us wot I shall do fur to get un?"

"Take hold on that 'spud-net' there," said Harris, pointing to the net in which the potatoes had been boiled for the mess, the other fellows near turning their backs so that Joblins couldn't see them laugh as he proceeded to carry out the joker's suggestion. "Ah, ye've got it all right, then? Now, Joblins, ye can take that to the upper deck, where they're now sarvin' out the grog for the port watch, and tell the 'Jaunty' that yer come fur yer second 'lowance."

Would you believe it?

Well, whether you do so or not, all I have to say is that the innocent yokel actually went up on deck with the potato-net in his hand, holding it out in front of him as he took his station beside those standing round the grog-tub.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the ship's steward, who acts as master of the ceremonies in this daily allowance of drink to the ship's company, assisted by one of the corporals, and sometimes even by the master-at-arms himself, the purveyor of the grog recognising him as having previously received his quota. "What do you want here? You've had your 'lowance already!"

Joblins, however, was reluctant to give up the chance of getting an additional supply without a struggle for it, so, he would not accept this rebuff.

"They sez below, sir," explained he, still holding out the spud-net straight in front of him, "as how I wer to tell yer, sir, as I wur a noo hand, an' yer would give I a second 'lowance."

"Oh, you're a new hand are you?"

"Ay," replied Joblins, in a very satisfied tone, thinking the matter was now satisfactorily settled. "That I be, sir."

"I thought so," said the ship's steward drily. "What are you going to put the grog in if I gave it to you?"

Joblins did not reply in words, but held out the net.

"Well," exclaimed the steward, with a grin on his face that was reflected in that of every one standing by, "I've heard of green hands and greenhorns before; but of all the raw johnnies I ever saw on board ship you take the cake!"

Strange to say, such was his denseness, that even then, the yokel could not see the point of the joke and the steward had to order him away.

"Now, clear out of this," he cried, getting a bit angry when his laugh was out. "Don't you see, you fool, if you can see anything at all, that the rum would run out of the net like water out of a sieve? Be off with you!"

Then at last the poor chap recognised the fact that Harris had been 'taking him in,' and darted down the ladder with the obvious intention of 'taking it out' of his tormentor; but the shout of merriment with which he was received when he got forward amongst the men again, stopped his saying anything, and the watch being just then called, his anger had time to evaporate before he had any further chance of calling his tormentor to account.

The weather continuing on the mend, the commodore gave orders to the officer of the watch, soon after dinner, to shape a course for Madeira, that being the appointed rendezvous of the squadron in the event of their parting company at any time in this first part of our cruise; for we had seen nothing of any of them since the beginning of the gale, the little *Ruby* being the last we had sighted shortly before our being forced to lie-to.

During the afternoon, however, the horizon clearing to the north and a gleam of sunshine lighting up the sea, a distant sail was seen hull down on our lee quarter.

"Signalman," hailed the officer of the watch, "what do you make her out to be?"

"Can't say yet, sir," replied the man, with the glass screwed to his eye, squinting to leeward. "She's too far off, sir."

After a short pause the officer repeated his question.

"Make her out yet, Jones?"

"No, sir," replied the signalman; "but she's rising now, sir, an' I thinks she's closing us."

"Ay."

Another short interval elapsed; and then, being down in the waist, right under the break of the poop, the quarter-master having set me to work flemishing down the slack ends of some of the sheets that he did not think were tidily arranged, I heard the signalman mumble some exclamation or other which he could not get out properly from his excitement.

"What is it, you say?" said the officer of the watch, who had gone to the binnacle to look at the compass and did not quite catch what the man said. "Speak distinctly, my man. I can't hear you!"

"It's the *Ruby*, sir!" shouted out the signalman, in a voice that could be heard, I believe, at the distance by which our consort was separated from us, making the officer of the watch, Lieutenant Robinson, jump off the deck, he having come up quite close in the meantime. "I knows her by the clew on her tops'l."

"All right, my man," blurted out the lieutenant, who was a crusty, ill-tempered, sour sort of chap, one always speaking to the men as if he had a bad liver and who couldn't look a chap square in the eye if he stood up before him, having underhung brows and a nasty way of looking from under them. "You needn't roar at me like a grampus, Jones. I've a great mind to put you in the list for disrespectful conduct to your superior officer! What did you say?"

"The *Ruby*, sir," repeated the signalman, as tenderly now as a sucking dove. "It's the gallant little *Ruby* sure enough, sir."

The irate lieutenant did not appear, though, to share the enthusiasm of Jones; and I afterwards heard that he had some grudge against the 'boss' of the *Ruby*, as indeed he had against most people with whom he came in contact; and I don't think many were sorry when he left the service subsequently to our cruise, starting in some line of civil life where his uncivil demeanour has probably gained him as many friends as he got afloat!

"I don't want any of your opinions, my man," said he; "and, if you talk of gallantry, I don't think she has stuck to us as she might have done in the gale. Probably, though, she couldn't help this; for she's a wretched tub and has the misfortune of having a nincompoop for a commander besides!"

Luckily for the sour-tempered chap, whom I had time to reckon up since I had been on board the corvette, the commodore did not hear what he said, or he would most probably, officer of the watch though he might be, have given him a 'dressing down' before us all.

The fact of our having sighted the *Ruby* had already been communicated by one of the midshipmen to our chief, who was down in his cabin having a rest, never having left the deck either day or night, I believe, since the gale overtook us; and, as soon as we got within signalling distance, he ordered the yeoman at the signal halliards to make our number.

Although the weather was becoming finer, as I have said, the wind was still gusty and chopping about between the east and nor'-east quadrants; and, hardly had our pennant been run up to the mizzen truck than the 'fly' of the flag got foul of the halliards.

"Hi, boy!" cried Lieutenant Robinson, wishing to be very smart, now the commodore was on deck. "'Way aloft there and free that flag!"

I thought he spoke to me, and jumped towards the weather shrouds to obey the order, but as I got into the rigging I saw 'Ugly' was before me.

He was in the chains and on his way up to the top before the lieutenant spoke, and naturally he had first addressed him.

'Ugly,' however, was so sluggish in his movements through the corvette rolling a bit and the ratlines being none too steady, that Lieutenant Robinson grew impatient.

"Here, you boy!" he roared at me even louder than Jones had spoken to him shortly before. "See if you can't teach that lubber how to climb aloft and free a flag when he is told, without taking a month of Sundays over the job!"

Almost before he had spoken I had sprung into the rigging after 'Ugly'; and by the time the lieutenant's last word was uttered I

was more than half-way up to the top, overhauling 'Ugly' at the crosstrees.

From thence, he and I proceeded upward, he on one side of the mast, I on the other, and neither speaking a word as we shinned up the 'Jacob's ladder.'

So we climbed up to the cap of the topgallant-mast in company; but, as far apart as the poles, though so close together.

Then, each of us set about in his own fashion, without minding the other, to disentangle the fly of the pennant, which had been whipped by the wind round the halliards till it had formed itself into half a dozen granny's knots.

We were holding on to the royal lift and brace, both of us, each with one hand while with the other we tried to unloose the closely knotted bunting, our faces almost touching each other, and still without ever saying a word; when, all at once, through some one having neglected his duty when the topgallant-mast was sent aloft after the gale, the ends of the lift and brace slipped off the jack, to which they had been only loosely secured, leaving 'Ugly' and I suspended in the air partly by the signal halliards and partly by the flag, which latter parted with a ripping sound that I hear now in my ears as I speak of it. Aye, and as I always shall hear it, I believe!

I heard also at the time, confused cries and orders from below, singing out I know not what.

My companion's face was close to mine as we swung from the feeble cord and more fragile stuff that interposed between us and eternity; a fall to the deck beneath or into the sea meaning death in one way or the other, either by drowning or by a more cruel fate.

I could see into his very soul, I think, at that awful moment, and he into mine!

It all occurred in an instant, recollect!

But in that instant 'Ugly' had time to break the silence that had existed between us since our fight on the forecastle of the *Saint Vincent* and my rescue of him aboard the same ship later on.

He spoke to me, at last, now.

"To-am Bowlin'," whispered he hoarsely, "two chaps can't hang on yere fur long. I'll give oop fur 'ee, me lad. Here goes!"

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## **Chapter Sixteen.**

### **"His Last Muster!"**

On that, the noble fellow, who thus unselfishly sacrificed his life for mine, fell with a whiz through the air that seemed to send the wind up into my face, down to the deck below.

Cannoning against the rigging on the port side, he was caught up in the belly of the mizzen-top sail, which slightly stopped the impetus of his descent, but, the concussion broke his spine, and when I, pale, trembling, and almost as lifeless as he, coming down from aloft, I hardly know how, reached his side, the doctor, who was bending over him and applying stimulants, said he had only a few moments longer to live.

The chaplain, too, was there, having been hastily summoned from his duties of instructing the young middies in the wardroom; as also was the commodore, with a graver face on him than I had ever seen before.

I don't know whether he heard my step, or the cry I ejaculated when the doctor spoke of his approaching end.

Whatever it was, something made my dying shipmate open his eyes just then, his glance wandering round the circle of those near.

"What is it, my poor lad?" asked the chaplain kindly, stooping down, so as to hear better any request he might make. "Is there anything you would like done or said for you?"

He was thinking, good man, no doubt, of offering up a prayer.

But the mind of Moses Reeks—to call him by his right name, and drop the somewhat opprobrious sobriquet by which I have hitherto styled the poor fellow, and by which, indeed, he was always known on board—was still bent on things terrestrial; though, possibly, his motive might have been as high and had as divine a source as anything the chaplain might have intended to say!



His eyes lighted on me and their wandering ceased.

"Coom here, lad," he whispered very faintly, so very faintly that his lips seemed to give out no sound at all. "Coom here!"

I heard, though, and went to his side, listening earnestly, for I could not speak.

He did not notice this, however, making up, with his slowly ebbing senses, what he wished himself to say.

"To-am Bowlin'," he faltered out in lisping accents with his failing breath, "ye've done Oi a toorn wanst, lad, an' I wer an oongrateful cur to 'ee, thet Oi wer, ez Oi didn't warnt fur to be a-beholden to yer; but you a' me, To-am, be naow quits, lad!"

As he thus spoke, a smile irradiated his rough-hewn features, making them look positively beautiful; and, with the last word he uttered, his spirit fled, with a sigh that was stifled in its birth.

The commodore uncovered his head in the presence of Death—the superior officer of even one flying the broad pennant and the personal representative of her Majesty wherever the broad red cross of Saint George, borne on that oblong flag, may float.

At that moment the ship's bugler forwards sounded the 'assembly.'

"Peace to his spirit, poor boy," said our chief solemnly. "He's gone to his last muster!"

It was Two Bells in the first dog-watch before the *Ruby* closed with us sufficiently to speak with us; when she reported that she had parted with the other ships of the squadron even before she had lost sight of us at the commencement of the gale, not seeing anything of them since.

Her commander also informed the commodore that they had lost two men overboard while reefing topsails in a squall, the sea running so high that it was impossible to lower a boat to save them.

We, in our turn, told of poor 'Ugly's' heroic end: and, as it was approaching sunset, his body was sewn up in his hammock, with a shot fastened to the feet, and committed to the deep.

All hands were present while the chaplain read the funeral service on the quarter-deck: and, as the grating on which the

poor fellow's remains rested, covered for the moment with the Union Jack, was canted through the port and its lifeless burden went below with a splash, to its last resting-place until the sea shall give up its dead, the waning sun dipped below the horizon.

We then squared yards and bore away straight for Madeira, with the *Ruby* keeping company on our lee beam; the wind having sobered down now to a good ten-knot breeze, and the weather all that one could wish, getting warmer with every hour of south latitude that we made.

Everybody was jolly that evening as we bowled along before the spanking breeze, fresh sail being set every watch, until the corvette was presently clothed in canvas from truck to keelson, the commodore wishing to take every advantage of the fair wind we had; but, though all the rest, sailor-like, were laughing and joking on the mess-deck forwards, I could not so soon forget the poor chap who had gone, his noble self-sacrifice being ever in my mind.

It was strange that reserved, unforgiving, and yet not unforgetful temperament of his!

I saw now, when too late, that he had not been quite oblivious of my having saved him that time on board the *Saint Vincent* when he so nearly tumbled from aloft. He had not been ungrateful, as Mick and I thought him, evidently.

On the contrary, the obligation he believed himself to be under to me had so weighed upon him that he was too proud to speak until he had cleared it off, so, he apparently fancied, to be able to treat with me on level terms.

Mick Donovan had not been on deck when the tragic occurrence happened; but he was almost as much impressed as myself when I told him of our shipmate's last words.

"Begorrah, Tom," cried he, wiping his eye with the sleeve of his jumper, "Oi wudn't 'a belaved it, sure, if ye hadn't towld me, mabouchal, wid yer own potato trap! Faith, the poor chap samed quoite a t'other sort. Sure, Tom, me darlint, as he's bin an' gone an' saved the noomber ov yer mess, be the powers, Oi'll spake to Father O'Flannagan whin I git back to Porchmouth an' ax him fur to say a mass, sure, fur the poor beggar, so that his sowl may rest in paice. May the saints protict him!"

Three days afterwards, without any further adventure, we anchored in Funchal Roads.

Here the squadron remained a week, the other ships having joined us when within a day's sail of Madeira; and, as we were going to make such a comparatively long stay, the men were granted leave to go ashore, watch and watch in turn.

Just before we left, the commodore gave a grand picnic to all the officers at the Grande Curral, when I had the luck of accompanying the party that went from our ship, a piece of good fortune shared by Mick, my chum.

This Curral, a name which means, I'm told, in the Spanish language a 'sheepfold,' is an immense valley, completely surrounded by hills, that lies a few miles to the north-west of Funchal, the capital of the island.

The hills encircling the natural plateau of the Curral are literally perpendicular, being in no part less than a thousand feet high; while round a part of the cliffs there is a narrow road leading to the 'garden houses' of the rich folk having business premises in the town, and a number of plantations, which is cut out of the solid rock and is about ten or twelve feet high.

As the picnic party went along over this road, the view presented to our eyes on looking down below was that of an unfathomable abyss, filled up by a mass of clouds and vapours, all rolling about in constant motion, and tumbling the one on top of another.

Mick and I were each aboard a mule and enjoyed ourselves to rights, racing against one another all the way; though we took precious good care to keep in the rear of our officers, amongst whom was Lieutenant Robinson, whose liver must have been particularly out of sorts that morning, for he was in a grumpier and more fault-finding mood than usual.

He did catch sight of us once as we were turning a sharp point in the road round a projection of a cliff; but, through the fortunate circumstance of the mule which the lieutenant was riding happening to bolt at the moment, the joker had too much to do in taking care of his own valuable carcass to have much time to growl at us.

The lieutenant, though, did not forget the incident: for, on Mick chancing to trip over one of his legs as he sat on the grass while handing him a plate of salad, the pleasant gentleman called him as many names as some of the watermen at Point are in the habit of using when they are put out of temper by being cheated of a fare.

"Bedad, Tom," whispered Mick to me, when he got out of range of the lieutenant's grapeshot, and we were having a feed ourselves in a quiet corner, "Oi wush thet blissid ould baist he wor roidin' hed run away wid him, sure, over the cliff an' made an ind ov the spalpeen! Faith, it isn't mesilf thet wud cry me oyes out, or wear mournin' fur him!"

On leaving Madeira, which we did with much regret, the people being very hospitable and most good-naturedly disposed towards all sailors, especially to British bluejackets, we fetched a compass for Teneriffe, where we arrived some three or four days afterwards; the commodore occupying the additional time in exercising the ships under his command, and matching them one against another.

In sailing on a wind the *Active*, I'm glad to say, beat all the rest of the squadron; though, in running before the wind, the little *Ruby* weathered on us and the *Volage*, our sister ship, ran us pretty close.

When nearing Teneriffe and close in to the African coast, we saw a splendid fight in the sea, between a big black whale on the one side, and a 'thrasher' or fox-shark on the other, aided by a swordfish, with which latter he had just apparently struck up an alliance offensive and defensive for the time.

The thrasher, which has a back as elastic as an india-rubber ball, would jump clean out of the water and give the whale a whack in the ribs that must have taken all the elasticity out of him; and then, on the poor leviathan of the deep fluking his tail to dive so as to escape from his aerial antagonist, his chum the swordfish would tickle up the whale from below by sending a yard or two of his long saw-like snout into his tenderest part.

Presently, as we luffed up to see the end of the fun, the sea in the vicinity of the fray became tinged with blood, the colour of carmine, showing that somebody at all events was having a bad time of it.

"By the powers, it bates Bannagher," cried Mick, who was watching the fight alongside of me on the upper deck, springing up on to the hammock nettings in his excitement to see the finish, unthinking of the breach of discipline he was committing. "Go it, ye cripples. Sure, Tom, the little wun'll win—what d'ye call him?"

"He's a thrasher," I replied, jumping up, too, on the top of the nettings. "A sort of shark, I think. Father has one stuffed at

home, stowed away somewhere, that looks like that chap. If so, he's a fox-shark."

"A fox-shark, begorrah!" repeated Mick, with a grin. "Faith, Tom, he's goin' fur that ould whale theer ez if he wor not ownly a fox, sure, but a pack of hounds as will, alannah!"

"Hi, there, you boys," roared out a voice at this juncture, which we had little difficulty in recognising as belonging to Lieutenant Robinson, who was again officer of the watch this afternoon, his turn of duty having once more come round. "Get off that netting at once and go below, both of you. Master-at-arms, take those boys' names down and put them in the report, and bring them up on the deck after 'divisions' to-morrow!"

The 'Jaunty,' who was standing below the break of the poop, looked up at the scowling lieutenant, saluting him.

"Very good, sir," said he, with another touch of his hat, in recognition of the authority of the speaker. "I will see to it, sir."

But, a 'Deus ex machina,' or 'God from the bathing-machine,' as our old captain of the *Saint Vincent* would have said in his Latin lingo, just then intervened on our behalf.

Mick Donovan and I were sneaking down the main hatch, like a pair of whipped dogs with their tails between their legs—though I must say we were more chagrined at losing the best part of the fight going on in the water, which was rapidly approaching a climax, than dismayed at having incurred the displeasure of the lieutenant—when, if you please, we heard somebody shout out something behind us, and the master-at-arms, who had followed in our wake, called out to us to stop.

"Belay there, you boys," he shouted down the hatchway. "Ye're to return on deck!"

In obedience to this order, we ascended the ladder-way again, retracing our steps at an even slower pace than we had gone down at; for we both expected, the same thought having flashed across our minds when the 'Jaunty' hailed us, that Lieutenant Robinson had, on more mature consideration, fancied he had let us off too lightly for the heinous offence we had committed, and had ordered us to be brought back to give us 'four dozen' apiece at least, there and then!

The result, however, was very different to our sad anticipations; for when we reached the deck the old commodore was standing

by the poop rail, close to the ladder on the port side leading down from thence into the waist of the ship.

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## **Chapter Seventeen.**

### **A Study in Black and White.**

"Lieutenant Robinson," said he to our persecutor, who looked ill at ease as he stood before him, the sextant which he had snatched up in a hurry to calculate the angle of distance of the whale and its antagonists now hanging listlessly in his hand, "be good enough, sir, to tell those boys that they may remain on the upper deck and look over the side, but that they must not stand on the hammock nettings. I like discipline to be preserved on board the ship I may have the honour to command, but I never allow any unnecessary severity being shown to the men or boys of the ship's company!"

Much against his will, the lieutenant, thus rebuked on the quarter-deck in the presence not only of his own brother-officers, but in that of all of us on the deck below as well, had now to 'eat humble pie' and give us the commodore's message; and, though Mick and I could not repress a grin on his bowing to us with mock politeness, we could see from the look in his underhung eyes that he intended to pay us out bye-and-bye when he had the chance for having been obliged to beg our pardon, as he had to do almost then.

Unhappily, though, the permission for us to look over the side again came too late; for the thrasher and the swordfish had been too much for the poor whale, whose huge lifeless body was now floating away to leeward, half a cable's length astern of the ship, surrounded by an eddy of bloody water, while its assailants had both disappeared.

"Begorrah," cried Mick, much disgusted at this, "sure, we're jist in toime to be too late!"

In our passage from Madeira to the Canary Islands we steered south by west, in order to avoid the Salvages.

These are a number of rocky islets, named the 'Great Piton,' the 'Little Piton,' and 'Ilha Grande,' lying in latitude 30 degrees 8 minutes north, and longitude 15 degrees 55 minutes west. The largest island is covered with bushes, amongst which thousands

of sea-fowl make their nests; and, from the fact of its not being seen until a ship be close in to it, when these very birds tell of its propinquity, by darkening the air almost as they rise, it is a great danger to mariners.

A little farther to the eastward is Lanzarote, which is very mountainous, possessing a volcano of its own, where a violent eruption took place not very long ago, when a stream of lava from two hundred to three hundred yards broad spread out into the sea like a river, the floating pumice-stone being picked up by passing vessels miles away.

For this piece of information I am indebted to the navigating officer, who happened to be telling one of the young midshipmen all about the place as I was attending to a job the boatswain had set me to aft.

I also heard him tell the same young gentleman a queer yarn about a buried treasure which is supposed to be concealed near a little cove on the southern extremity of the island, called 'Janubio.' The story goes that, in the beginning of the century—I think the navigator said it was in the year 1804, but I am not quite certain—the crew of a South American Spanish treasure ship, bound to Cadiz from Lima with produce and which had besides over two millions of dollars in chests aboard, mutinied, and murdered their captain and officers; the rascals then making off in the long boat with this treasure towards an island, which, from the description given, must have been either Lanzarote or one of the Salvages.

On this island, whichever it was, the dollars were carried ashore and buried above high-water mark in a snug little bay to the south; the mutineers, according to the prevailing superstition of such gentry, burying the body of their murdered captain on top of the treasure, so that his ghost might prevent any unprivileged intruders from meddling with their cache.

The navigator said, just as I was going down below after finishing my job, that this tale was told to an English sailor by one of the surviving mutineers; and he added that the Admiralty were so much impressed by its appearance of truth that Admiral Hercules Robinson, the grandfather, I believe, of our present High Commissioner at the Cape of Good Hope, was actually sent out to make a search for the treasure when in command of HMS *Prometheus*, in 1813.

We coaled at Teneriffe, putting into the harbour of Santa Cruz for this purpose; and Mick and I were much struck by the fact of

the black ladies who carried the baskets of coal on their heads along the jetty from the shore to the ship, doing the job, too, in first-rate style and as good as any gang of wharfingers at home, all of them wearing the most expansive crinolines, which, with their thin dresses and black stockings, of nature's own provision, had a very comical effect!

"Faith!" exclaimed Mick, after watching these dusky belles with much interest for some time, the lot of them chattering and laughing away, showing their teeth, which a dentist would have given something to possess for his showcase, "Oi'd loike Father O'Flannagan jist for to say thim quare craychurs, Tom, me hearty, if ownly to say him toorn oop the whoites ov his oyes. Bedad, he'd be afther sprinklin' 'em wid howly wather an' exorcisin' on 'em, ez if he'd sayn the divvle, sure!"

Jones the signalman, who was standing near when Mick said this, laughed.

"Your old priest would have his work cut out for him in more ways than that," said he, with a very significant wink to one of the other hands, "if he'd only go to Grand Canary instead of Teneriffe!"

The name he mentioned at once made Mick cock his ear.

"Grand Canary," repeated my chum after the signalman, with a puzzled look on his face. "Ain't thet the place, Tom, whare thim yaller burds yer sither Jenny has, sure, at home comes from? She s'id they wor canaries, Oi'd take me davy!"

"Of course, they are, Mick," said I, in reply to this. "Why, mother must have a hundred of them in the shop at this very minute, besides those little ones she brought up herself which Jenny used to act as nurse to!"

"Och, sure, Oi rimimber thim will enuff," answered Mick, with a melancholy look on his face, as if his mind had turned back from Santa Cruz to Bonfire Corner all of a sudden and to our little house there. "An' thet little chap ov a canary thet had a crist on the top ov his hid, loike a crown, sure, thet yer sither Jenny used fur to make so much ov—the little darlint!"

Whether this term of endearment of his was meant by Mick to apply to Jenny or the bird, I can't say; but I could see clearly enough in what direction his thoughts were concentrated.



"Begorrah, Tom," he said after a pause, during which his eyes were apparently fixed on the celebrated 'Peak' for which Teneriffe is better known in the present day than on account of its canaries; for it is over four hundred years since these little songsters were first discovered by the Spaniards and imported into Europe, so that any novelty that might have been attached to them has long since disappeared, "Oi'll git some ov the purty craychurs fur yer sisther if we're 'lowed ashore afore we lave."

"I don't think you will be able to do that," said the signalman, who had remained alongside of us looking at the darkeys passing to and fro on the jetty below, from which a gangway of planks led through one of the midship ports to the coal-bunkers. "We're not likely to stop here after we've coaled ship."

Mr Jones was mistaken, however; for we remained at Santa Cruz some four-and-twenty hours longer, so that Mick and I had the opportunity of landing with the wardroom steward the next morning, when he went to buy some fresh milk and other things for the officers' mess.

We then, during a short walk we had in the vicinity of the town, saw numbers of canaries flitting about amid the trees, just like you see sparrows at home; and it seemed very strange, to me especially, accustomed as I was to mother's bird-shop and its live stock, that the little things should be uncaged and roaming about there free, at their own will and pleasure!

The birds, though, did not have anything like the bright plumage of those bred in captivity at home; and I would have backed, so far as their looks went, a splendid little chap Jenny had called 'Tubby,' against the lot of them; while 'Corry,' another canary of a more reflective character and retiring disposition than the first, could have afforded a dust of the golden hue of his feathers to make his Teneriffean cousins more presentable without being much less yellow himself—their hue, so far as Mick and I noticed, being more of a dingy white than chrome.

As to bringing any of them to England, however, that we found an impossibility; for there were so many young midshipmen and other youngsters aboard the various ships of the squadron, that if all of them had been free to take birds into their cabins, the ships would have been so many floating aviaries!

So, to prevent this, the commodore had issued strict orders that no pets of any description were to be taken on board by any one.

"I s'pose, though, my corns don't count," observed the wardroom steward, as we were stepping into the boat on our return to the ship and one of his assistants trod on his foot. "I've a favourite one on my starboard toe, Smith, as might be called a pet o' mine; and, by jingo, you lubber, you just then made marmalade of it. You wait till we get aboard and I'll put you on short rations! See if I don't!"

Later on in the afternoon the squadron sailed for Barbados, starting off out of Santa Cruz harbour before a spanking ten-knot breeze in line of single column ahead, the old *Active* leading and showing her heels to our less speedy consorts.

This was early in the month of December, the weather being beautiful and balmy, as it continued all the time we were bowling across the Atlantic on our way to our goal, the West Indies; and, as we enjoyed the warmth of the southern latitudes through which our good ship ploughed her way, Mick and I could not help contrasting our surroundings with those of the poor folk at home shivering in all the dreariness of an English mid-winter, when, if it isn't freezing or snowing or hailing, it is bound to be raining—a cold, raw, nasty sort of rain—and damp and foggy and dirty, at all events, such being the pleasurable conditions of our delightful climate usually at that time of year!

With us, now, things were very different!

A blue sky above, unflecked by a single cloud, was reflected in a sea that was yet more blue, its hue turning to azure as we approached farther west in the tropics; until, on reaching the confines of the Caribbean Sea, the colour of the water verged into that of the purest ultramarine.

Day after day the scene was ever the same—blue sky above, blue sea below; while a bright sun shone down, ever lighting up both sky and sea with a sort of opal glow and lending warmth to the buoyant, exhilarating, champagne air.

Under these circumstances, washing decks every morning used to be a positive pleasure to everybody on board, as we careered about in our bare feet with our trousers rolled up above the knee, when the cold water, instead of being 'moighty onpleasint,' as Mick would have said, was gratifying in the extreme.

Such of the officers, too, who had not been on duty keeping the middle watch, used to turn out in their oldest pyjamas, accompanied by most of the midshipmen, when we were at this

task and have a regular sluice down on the forecastle; some of them catching hold of the hose and playing it on each other in turn, skylarking and making no end of fun.

Our drills, of course, went on all the time in the usual clockwork fashion observed on board ship, 'quarters' and 'divisions' and all the rest; all of the men and boys belonging to the ship's company being polished up quite as smartly as the brasswork and drilled to the highest state of efficiency.

It was not all work, though, on board the *Active*; for our commodore, taut disciplinarian as he was and as anxious to lick us all into shape as he was to make the ships of his squadron manoeuvre handily, exercising them at all hours both of day and night to this end, did not forget the old adage that a bow should not always be bent.

No, he always allowed us plenty of time for relaxation and enjoyment, besides permitting us to fish overboard, which some commanders would not have allowed.

This was rare sport, I can tell you, the bonetta, a fish common to the tropics and eating uncommonly well when fried, biting freely at a piece of white bunting or any other attractive object attached to a hook, as did the many-hued dolphin, and many a hearty supper did we have on the lower deck through the kindly aid of these beneficent denizens of the deep.

One of the foretopmen who hailed from Newfoundland was an expert with the harpoon, spearing with that weapon as many dolphins as he liked; these beggars being in the habit of plying to and fro under the corvette's cutwater as she sailed onward, delighting apparently in showing us the dexterity with which they could wheel about and leap athwart the ship's course as they pleased, keeping up with her or going ahead according to their bent.

We saw lots of flying-fish also; and they, when we had the chance of catching the few that came aboard, were even better fare for hungry sailor-boys of an evening than the dolphins and bonetta.

These latter used to hunt the poor flying-fish like a pack of hounds after some prey on land, the fish leaping out of the sea and making short flights by the aid of the membraneous fins they have, which they extended like wings, flying for some twenty yards or so till exhaustion compelled their return to their

native element—a characteristic feature that has gained the 'flying-fish' its name.

Unfortunately for the poor beggars, however, they have an enemy aloft as well as one below; and, when they leave the water to escape the bonetta, they fall into the clutches of the sea-hawks that hover over the surface on the watch for them; and so, thus situated 'between two stools,' as it were, 'their lot,' like that of the 'Bobby' in the song, being 'not a happy one!'

Amid such varied changes of life and scene, our three weeks' voyage from Teneriffe to Barbados passed quickly and pleasantly enough, all hands being surprised one fine morning when we cast anchor in Carlisle Bay, the harbour of 'Little England,' as the Barbadians proudly style their happy island, which is of the same size and shape nearly as the Isle of Wight and is the gem of the Antilles!

Here we had a rare time of it for a week, it being Christmastide, and the inhabitants, who are English to the backbone, black, mongrel, and copper-coloured, as well as white, keeping up that festival with like enthusiasm to what we do at home.

As at Madeira, the ship's company were allowed leave to go on shore, watch and watch in turn: so, belonging as we both did to the starboard division, Mick and I were amongst those who had the first go-off.

I recollect, as if it were but yesterday, our landing alongside the jetty on the carenage, right in front of one of Da Costa's big warehouses, whose green jalousies relieved the effect of the staring white building under the hot West Indian sun; the glare of which, cast back by the rippling translucent water that laved the stone jetty, through which one could see the little fishes gliding about as clearly as in the Brighton Aquarium, almost blinded us with its intensity.

There were a lot of negro women hanging round the wharf in front of Da Costa's place, all of whom had big baskets, either balanced on their heads or put down on the ground by their side, which were filled with huge melons and pine-apples and bananas, besides many other tropical fruits the names of which are unknown to me.

Of course, we made for these at once; and there was a lot of chaffering and bargaining between our fellows and the negresses, who were all laughing and showing their white teeth, trying their best to wheedle the 'man-o'-war buckras' to buy

their luscious wares at double the price, probably, such would fetch in open market from regular customers in Bridgetown.

Presently, we all got skylarking and pitching the fruit about; when a big mulatto, who was along with one of the fruit-sellers—her husband most likely and doing nothing just as likely, like most of his colour, for the household of which he was the head, save to collect the money his better half in every respect earned—seemed very much aggrieved at some damage Mick did to a bunch of ripe bananas, claiming a ‘bit’ or fourpence as compensation.

Mick, who, you must know, had grown a strapping fellow by now, took the tawny-complexioned gentleman’s demand very good-humouredly.

“All roight, ould Patchwork,” he called out, with a laugh. “Thare’s a shellin’ fur ye, which is more, bedad, than yer howl sthock-in-thrade is worth! Changee fur changee, black dog fur whoite moonkey, sure, as my ould fayther used fur to say!”

Whatever mollifying effect the sight of the silver coin might have produced on the mulatto’s mind was entirely swamped by Mick’s unfortunate quotation from his paternal archives.

“Say, you sailor buckra, who dat you call one black dog, hi!” said he, coming up to my chum in a threatening manner, brandishing his arms and working his head about like a teetotum in a fit. “I’s no niggah slabe, you white trash! I’s free ‘Badian born, an’ ‘low no man make joke ob me!”

Mick roused up in a minute.

“Faith, ye oogly yaller-faced raskil,” he cried, putting up his fists in the scientific way we had learnt from long practice on board with the gloves under our gymnasium instructor, “Oi’ll knock ye into the middle of nixt Soonday wake, ef ye don’t kape a civil toongue in yer hid an’ put yer owld dhrumsticks behind ye!”

Instead of acting on Mick’s advice, however, the mulatto, screaming with rage, and his whole face distorted with passion, made a wild rush at him, trying to butt him in the stomach.

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## Chapter Eighteen.

## **"Reef Topsails!"**

"A ring! A ring! Form a ring, all you Actives!" shouted out Mr Jones the signalman, who had come ashore with us, wishing to see the battle between our representative and the darkey conducted in regular shipshape fashion, in accordance with the rules observed in polite pugilistic circles at home. "Form a ring, my lads, and let 'em fight it out fair. If any of them blooming niggers tries to h'interfere, boys, you jest fetch 'em a crack on the shins with yer dancing pumps; it's no good trying to hit 'em on their nobbs, as they're made of the same stuff of the cocoanuts, and you might hit at 'em till doomsday without ever their feelin' on it, jist the same as if ye were hammerin' at the watertight bulkhead forrud!"

No sooner said than done.

With the help of the other bluejackets who had come ashore with us in the second cutter, the ring which the signalman suggested was at once formed, our chaps artfully manoeuvring so as to shut out all the black and coloured gentry who instantly flocked to the scene of action, the news of the fight having got abroad in some mysterious way or other.

Before this had been done, however, Mick Donovan received and repulsed the mulatto's first onslaught in a highly satisfactory manner for our side.

Lifting his left knee suddenly as the infuriated beggar rushed in upon him in catapult fashion, with his body doubled and his head bent low, Mick at the same time, with all the force of his good right arm, struck downwards at the darkey's exposed ear, which was about the size of a small plate, catching him thus between his knee and fist like a piece of iron a blacksmith might be at work on at the forge beaten flat between hammer and anvil.

Result—down dropped the mulatto as if he were a felled ox!

"Hooray!" yelled out all the Actives; while there was a groan and a rush from the surrounding compatriots of Mick's opponent to pick up their champion. "Give the bloomin' nigger fits, me boy! You've pretty nearly done for him already."

But, the mulatto was not by any means settled yet.

Encouraged by his sympathising backers, of whom we allowed some five or six to enter the ring, wishing to play fair and not to

have it all to ourselves, the mulatto shook himself as if he had just come out of the water; and, standing up in a proper manner now, he faced Mick, who smilingly beckoned him to come on.

"Hit 'im in de eyeball, Bim!" cried one of the dark ladies, who indeed was the cause of the fray, as generally is the case, I have been told, when menfolk fall out. "Yah, yah! Mash um face fo' um, de imperent man-o'-war buckra!"

"Go it, Mick!" cried we. "Land him one in his bloomin' bread-basket!"

A very pretty bit of sparring now ensued, the two being well matched; for, though the mulatto was the taller and had the longer reach of arm, Mick had a better guard, holding his right well out across his chest, and dodging in his left every now and then, keeping moving about on his pins as lightly as an opera-dancer.

Once 'Mr Bim' got in a roundabout blow that landed on Mick's left cheek, which drew blood, and sent him all of a stagger into the corner where the signalman and I stood officiating as bottle-holders.

This raised a wild yell of excited enthusiasm from all the assembled darkeys, both ladies and gentlemen alike.

"Golly, dat fetch um, Bim!" they shouted. "Gib um goss, Bim! 'Badian too brabe; um beat all de buckra sailor trash in de whole world, you bet!"

"Stow that, you ugly black devil!" interposed one of our men, fetching the mulatto's partisan a crack on the shins with the cutter's boathook, which he held in his hand, he being bowman and left in charge of the boat. "You just keep out o' the ring if ye know what's good for you!"

"By gosh!" cried the poor nigger, hopping about on one leg and rubbing his shin, writhing with pain at being thus assaulted on his tenderest point; grabbing up some missile or other from the roadway, whither he retreated, "I'se crack yo' tam skull wid um rockstone, fo' suah!"

Mick did not 'come up smiling' as he advanced to meet his foe after the knock-down blow he had received; but, from the look on his face, with his lips tight set and his eyes fixed on the mulatto, I could see he 'meant business.'

He did.

Parrying another wild whirl of 'Mr Bim's' arms, which he swung out right and left, Mick dropped his; and with a step forward he grasped the mulatto round the waist, when, going down on one knee, he sent him flying over his shoulder completely outside the ring.

Fortunately for the poor beggar, his head went plump into one of the baskets of fruit, squashing its contents together into the semblance of jam, which probably saved the mulatto's life; for, had he fallen headlong on the stone jetty, his cranium would most likely have resembled the bananas and ripe melons in the black lady's basket that he had spoilt, and his neck, as likely as not, broken. As it was, 'Mr Bim' had enough of it, coming up quite dazed when he recovered his senses; then retiring from the combat without a single further word, either of apology or of defiance.

His compatriots bore no malice to Mick or ourselves, as might have been expected from their champion having got the worst of it.

On the contrary, they raised a cheer when we turned to leave the scene of action, accompanying us into the town, and dancing round us in their amusing way, and making quite a triumphal procession of our progress up Roebuck Street.

"Golly, Sambo!" one of them shouted out to another of their number, who evidently was the local poet of the party. "You makee singsong ob de lilly buckra sailor!"

Thereupon, the poet, who was clearly a man of vivid imagination and spontaneous genius, at once struck up a doggerel rhyme; all of them taking up the chorus as they marched along on either side of us:—

"Man ob war buckra, man ob war buckra,  
Jus' come ashore, jus' come ashore,  
Jus' come ashore!

"'Badian gen'leman, 'Badian gen'leman,  
He make um roar, he make um roar,  
He make um roar!

"Man ob war buckra an' 'Badian gen'leman,  
Dey hab a shindy, dey hab a shindy,  
Dey hab a shindy!



“Badian gen’leman, he mash um mout’;  
Man ob war buckra, um bash um snout;  
Golly, yah, yah,  
Um bash um snout!”

“Begorrah!” exclaimed Mick, none the worse for the fray, beyond a slight cut on his port cheek, which had been caused by the scrape of the mulatto’s long nails and not by his fist, as he burst into a roar of laughter on the darkeys bringing out this impromptu musical account of the recent fight—in which all hands joined, making most of the passers-by we met on our route to one of the hotels recommended by Mr Jones, who had been to Bridgetown before, look round to see what was the matter—“it bates Bannagher an’ Donnybrook Fair all rowled into one, sure!”

It need hardly be said after this, that, on our presently reaching the favourite hostelry of our guide, the signalman, we stood treat to all the darkeys; and then, having had enough of their somewhat too marked attentions, we parted company, with the most friendly feelings on both sides.

The people altogether received us very kindly, all sorts of festivities being held in our honour, officers and men alike having balls and dinners and picnics and cricket-matches all got up especially for their pleasure; so that our fortnight’s stay at Barbados was one long holiday from the first day to the last, for, if we did not happen to be ashore, parties of ladies and gentlemen used to come off to see the ship and be entertained in their turn.

We sailed from our anchorage, near the lighthouse at Needham Point to the north-east of the bay, somewhere in the second week of January, making first for Tobago, which lies more to the southward of the Windward Islands. After this we visited Trinidad and most of the other colonies, calling also at the French possessions of Guadaloupe and Martinique, before returning for a final look in at Barbados on our way home again to England.

After leaving Carlisle Bay for the second time, the squadron made for Bermuda, the commodore hoping to pick up the light westerly winds which are to be met with at this season of the year hereabouts; but, when to the south of the thirtieth parallel, we encountered a terrific gale from the north-west, which was

as child's play in comparison to the one we experienced in the Bay of Biscay.

Up to then we had experienced very fair weather, being able to carry all our upper sail and stunsails as well; but, all at once, without any warning, save that the heavens suddenly darkened overhead, obscuring the sun, and the barometer began to fall, as I heard the navigating officer say to the commodore, whom he passed on his way on deck from the wardroom below, a storm broke over us!

The next moment, the whistles of the boatswain's mates were ringing through the ship, with the customary hoarse hail down the hatchways—

"Watch, shorten sail!"

Then, as we tumbled up to our stations, it became a case of let go and clew up.

"Topmen, aloft!" sang out the commodore from the break of the poop, in sharp, piercing accents that rose above the whistle of the wind through the rigging and the dull roar of the sea, which had assumed now a leaden appearance, instead of the bright blue which it boasted the moment before, while its surface began to work into short choppy waves that tossed their crests like horses champing the bit. "Take in the to'gallants and royals!"

Up we all raced aloft; but no sooner had these sails been furled and we reached the deck than the commodore was at us again.

"Watch, reef tops'ls!" he shouted even louder than before. "Away aloft—take in one reef!"

Mick and I scrambled up, almost out of breath, into the mizzen-top; which we hardly reached before we heard the commodore give the next order necessary to enable us to take in the reef—

"Weather tops'l braces, round in! Lower the tops'ls!"

Next followed our own especial order—

"Trice up and lay out!"

In obedience to this, we made our way out on the foot-ropes, Mick securing the weather earring, when we began knotting the

points and reefing in earnest; after which, the topsail halliards were manned below and the yards run up again.

The wind now shifted from the northward to the north-east, coming on to blow pretty hard; so the courses were clewed up and furled and the jib hauled down, the ship presently running under her close-reefed topsails and fore-topmast staysail.

By Six Bells, however, the storm had increased to such an extent, that, after trying what treble-reefing would do, we had to take in our topsails altogether, laying-to under storm staysails and easy steam, the engine-fires had been lit and the screw lowered on the first break of the storm, so as to keep the ship-head to wind and provide for any eventuality that might come.

The sea at this time was a terrible sight, the big billows racing madly past us and jostling each other, tossing their spray and spent water right over the main-yard; while, anon, the corvette would be lifted bodily up on top of what seemed a high mountain, from whence we viewed the wide stretch of broken waves extending as far as the eye could reach; anon, plunging us down into a deep dark watery abyss, as if she were going to founder!

We rolled so, that preventer stays were rigged to make sure of our masts and the guns were secured with double lashings round the breech; while lifelines were rove fore and aft to assist us in keeping our footing along the deck.

So far, we had been all alone; the other ships of the squadron having parted company early in the afternoon, each making shift as best she could for herself.

Not a sail was in sight anywhere on the horizon.

But, presently, careering onwards before the heavy storm clouds ahead, out of which she emerged all in a moment like some spirit of the deep, a large full-rigged ship appeared, bearing down upon us at the rate of twenty knots an hour, I should think, judging by the way she rapidly rose out of the water. It looked as if she were going to run us down.

"Sail ahead!" roared out the lookout-man forwards, his voice borne back inboard by the wind and seeming all the louder in consequence. "She's a-coming down end on to us, sir!"

The commodore aft, however, had seen our peril, even before the lookout-man spoke; and almost at the same instant that his words of warning reached our ears—the while the hands on deck stared with horror at the surging ship, nearing us now closer and closer as we looked at her—the gallant, ready-witted sailor had taken effective measures to avoid the imminent danger threatening us.

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## **Chapter Nineteen.**

### **“Sail Ho!”**

“Stand by, the watch forrud!” he sang out, in a voice of thunder, putting his hands to his mouth so as to form a speaking-trumpet, as he leant against the poop rail, and pitching his key so high that his order triumphed over the noise of both wind and sea. “Man the jib halliards! Hoist away!”

In the meantime the engine-room bell had been rung and rapid directions given to go astern full speed, our screw being down and steam got up long since, as I have already mentioned, so as to be prepared for a similar emergency.

“Hard up with the helm!” now shouted the commodore, who seemed to have taken the management of the ship for the moment entirely in his own hands; and then, looking forwards, he roared again to us on the forecastle, “Haul taut your jib sheet!”

The sail served its turn, with the backing of the screw, to make the corvette’s head pay off as we wore ship; but the strength of the nor’-east gale was such, that hardly had we made the sheet fast, ere the jib blew clean away from its lacing, with the sound of a gun going off, while a big wave came over our weather side at the same time, and nearly washed every man-jack off the forecastle, beside flooding the waist, the sea rushing down in a torrent below through the after-hatchway which had not been battened down as yet.

It was a ticklish operation wearing with such a wind and sea on, and might have been attended with even worse peril than happened; for, if caught in the trough of some wave, broadside on, we might have capsized, instead of merely taking a hundred tons of water or so on board, which we could have very well dispensed with.

However, it was our only chance of getting out of the way of the approaching vessel—at least so our old commodore deemed, and he ought to have been, and was too, the best judge.

And the ship!

None of us for a second or two thought of looking for her, the men all rushing to their stations, and the port watch having been called on deck, as well as us chaps belonging to the starboard division, who were already there, in case of our broaching-to and our masts going by the board—which everybody believed, I think, barring the commodore, would have occurred.

Now, therefore, on our succeeding in paying off so handsomely without any serious mishap, the *Active* scudding and running before the wind like a racehorse under her bare poles, so to speak, the scraps of storm staysails we carried being not worth taking into account, the eyes of every one were turned at once to windward to see what had become of the stranger vessel.

She had completely disappeared!

Whether she had luffed up too suddenly on seeing the danger of a collision between us, or had gone down all standing as she careered onward, no one will ever know; for, though lookouts were sent aloft and the horizon scanned in every direction, not a single trace of her was to be seen anywhere in sight, albeit the billowy surface of the tempest-tossed sea was so white with foam that any dark object would at once have been distinguished on its tumid bosom.

Not a trace was to be seen of the fine ship, which a moment ago was riding the waters like a thing of life, even if impelled to run before the fury of the gale—either astern of us, or ahead; or on our starboard beam, as she should have been by rights if matters had turned out differently; nor yet to port.

No, not a trace of her anywhere!

All of us seemed, really, to feel as if we had lost somebody or something; and when, presently, the watch was piped down, we all went below with saddened hearts.

“Oi wondther now,” said Mick, when we were having our supper at our messing-place aft on the lower deck a little later on, “if thet theer vissil wor a raal ship, Tom, or a banshee?”

A man at the mess-table next ours heard his remark and burst out laughing.

"I've heard tell o' the Flying Dutchman being seen in stormy weather when going round the Cape," he said, speaking across the table in our direction; "but I can't say as how I ever heard before of a banshee adrift on the wide Atlantic Ocean!"

"Bedad, Oi say no rayson agin it," replied Mick, standing up for the superstitions of his country like a man. "Faith, a banshee can go ony where he loikes."

"Ay?" said the other interrogatively. "What is a banshee, my lad?"

"Begorrah," answered Mick, crossing himself, "thet's more'n ony one knows, may the saints presairve us fur mintionin' on 'em! They'll be sperrits, Oi thinks, if Oi don't misremimber, ez can take ony shape they plaizes!"

"Oh, spirits?" exclaimed the other man chaffingly, thinking he was going to pull Mick's leg a bit. "What sort o' spirits, my lad—is it rum, or gin, or whisky, now, you mean?"

Mick did not reflect a bit, but came out pat with his answer.

"Faith!" said he drily, setting the table in a roar as he winked from one to the other of the mess opposite, though this wink of his was hardly necessary, the habits and character of his questioner being very well known throughout the ship, "it's a rum taste ye'd foind thim sperrits, Oi'm afther thinkin', Misther Sharp! Bedad, yer gin wud be ez hot ez ginger; an' it's preshus little toime ye'd hev fur tournin' down the whisky, ez ye did, faith, the t'other day, whin ye wor brought up 'fore Noomber One on the quarter-deck, sure, fur goin' to shlope on the watch! Begorrah, if ye don't look out sharp, Misther Sharp, ye'll hev the divvle whiskin' ye off wid his tail, sure, fur thet same whisky ye're talkin' of!"

"Well, well, my joker," said Sharp good-humouredly, joining in the laugh of the rest of the chaps, though it was against himself; "I'm sorry I hurt your feelings about that Irish banshee of yours!"

This turned the merriment of the mess towards Mick again; but he came up to the scratch as 'smilingly' as he did in his fight with the mulatto at Barbados.

"Bedad," said he unflinchingly, "the banshees, sure, the saints presairve the good people from harmin' us! Can take virry good care ov thimselves; but, faith, if ye'd ivver sane wun, ye'd spake more rispictfully ov thim, sure!"

"Tell us," inquired Joblins, the 'green hand,' you may recollect, who went on deck to fetch his second lot of grog with a spud-net and who, though he had been made a bit sharper since then by the chaff and jokes of his messmates, was still not by any means bright, "did yer ever see one o' them ghostesses?"

"Hev Oi ivver sane wun?" repeated Mick, in a tone of intense scorn. "Begorrah, Oi hev sane hoondreds!"

"Lor'!" exclaimed the simpleton, evidently impressed by this bold assertion of my chum, "tell us, mate, wot they's like."

This was enough for Mick.

"Ye won't be frightened, sure," he began, in a very solemn tone, the more to impress the anxious listener, "if Oi'm afther tillin' ye the whole thruth, now?"

"Frightened! No," replied Joblins defiantly, but looking nervous all the same. "I ain't so soon frightened as that, Mick!"

"All roight, me joker," said Mick. "Oi ownly thort ez how Oi'd not take ye onywheres, ye know; but, faith, ez Oi say ye're so brave a chap, Oi'll now carry on an' till ye all about a raal banshee Oi saw t'other noight."

Joblins moved uneasily on his seat.

"What!" he cried. "Yer doan't mean aboard this yere ship?"

"Ay, faith," said Mick coolly; "it wor aboard this virry ship, begorrah!"

"Lor'!" stammered out 'greeny,' whose face we could see was quite pale from the light of the ship's lantern near, it having got dark now on the lower deck through the closing in of the evening early, we being still in tropical latitudes. "I thort them things only came on land."

"That's where you're wrong, Joblins," put in Harris, his old tormentor, backing up Mick most effectively in his attempt at taking a rise out of the yokel. "Spirits aboard ship is pertic'lerly partial to water, as every one knows!"

Passing by this ironical allusion of Harris to the current belief of all hands anent the watering of the men's grog by the steward, which was received with much favour by those standing round, Mick went on as gravely as a judge.

"Yis, sor, it wor aboard this viry ship thet Oi sayd me last spirit, sure," said he. "Lit me say—it moost hev bin a wake, ay, or mebbe t'wor longer agone than thet. Oi wor a-coomin' oop the forepake afther dark, jist ez it mebbe now. Ye knows the forepake, Joblins?"

"Ye-e-es," stuttered out 'greeny,' his jaw dropping with fright, and his mouth open as big as a teacup. "I—I—I knows the forepeak, mate."

"Will, thin," continued Mick, "ez Oi came out on dick oop the fore-hatchway, be the powers, I says, sure, a tirrible big black thing roight foreninst me, wid its long arrums stritched oot on ayther soide; an' whin Oi looked oop fur to say if the onairthly craychur hed ony hid on him—"

"Lor'!" cried Joblins, interrupting him at this thrilling point, all agog with excitement; "what did you see, mate?"

"Faith," replied my chum, with a grin, "the poor craychur hed no hid at all, at all, sure! Begorrah, all he hed, sure, wor a spud-net, same as ye titched yer sicond 'lowance ov grog t'other day wid, Misther Joblins; an' this wor stuck atop ov wun ov the min's oilskins thet he'd hoong oot fur to dhry in the fore rigging. Thet wor the spirrit I sayd."

The roar of the boatswain's mate calling 'all hands' to make sail, at this juncture drowned the general laugh that went round the mess at poor Joblins' expense; and, exchanging the warm atmosphere of the lower deck for the boisterous weather above, we were soon engaged in the more arduous task of pulling ropes than other people's legs!

We had run some distance scudding before the gale; and, as the navigating officer thought that we were now pretty well beyond the risk of experiencing any further ill effects from the stormy nor'-easter, the commodore made up his mind to utilise it and proceed on our voyage home.

So setting our topsails double-reefed again and bracing round the yards on a bowline, we shaped a course for the Azores or Western Islands; and getting into calmer latitudes ere morning, were able to make all plain sail again.



On the second day after this we had an awful thunderstorm, in which the lightning flashed from all points of the compass, and heaven's artillery pealed as if the sky was bursting asunder.

This was followed by a deluge of rain, which washed our decks cleaner than they had been since we left our home port, though the first lieutenant was pretty sharp about seeing them scrubbed and washed down daily.

The same afternoon, when it had cleared up again, the sun coming out and the waves calming down, our lookout-man aloft in the foretop sighted something in the distance.

"Sail ho!" he cried, "on our lee bow."

Every eye was cocked as we peered over the bulwarks, and every ear strained to catch what followed.

"Where away?" hailed the commodore, who was walking up and down aft, taking a constitutional after his lunch, I suppose. "What do you make it out to be?"

"A boat adrift, sir, I think," replied the lookout-man, stopping to have another good look at the object. "It's well away on our lee bow, sir, and we're passing it abeam now."

"Very good, my man," said the commodore; and, turning to the officer of the watch, he added, "Square the yards, Mr Osborne, and we'll run down and see what it is."

This order was soon carried out; when, with our sticks braced round to the brisk breeze, which had shifted to the westward since the thunder-storm, we were soon bowling down before it, our sails bellied out to their utmost in the direction indicated by the lookout-man in the foretop, who was now aided by the eyes of half a dozen midshipmen or more, all eagerly scanning the horizon ahead with all sorts of telescopes and binoculars.

"Lookout-man!" hailed the commodore after a bit, "how does the boat bear now?"

"Dead on the weather bow, sir," returned the man the next instant. "We're about a couple o' mile off her, sir."

The commodore then addressed the quarter-master aft.

"Luff up!" he cried—"half a point will do; and, Mr Osborne, take a pull at your lee braces. That will do—steady!"

The ship having good way upon her, we soon overhauled the drifting boat, which we could make out presently quite clearly from the deck.

Nearer and nearer we approached it, until we could look down right into it and see a number of figures, all of whom, however, were motionless.

"Begorrah!" cried Mick, who stood near me in the fore-chains, ready with a rope to chuck down into the little craft as we surged alongside it, as indeed were several others also, like prepared, forwards; "they've bin havin' a divvle ov a row, or foightin', or somethin', sure; fur Tom, look thare, me bhoy—can't ye say some soords or a pair of cutlashes or somethin' like 'em oonder the afther-thwart theer?"

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## **Chapter Twenty.**

### **"Jocko."**

"I believe I do, Mick," I said, squinting down as eagerly as himself into the boat, near to which the ship was gradually sidling up, her way having been checked by her being brought up to the wind and the maintop-sail backed. "They are very quiet, poor chaps. I wonder if they are all dead?"

The same thought seemed to have occurred to the old commodore; for, as I said this, in pursuance of some order he must have given to that effect—for nobody does a thing on board a man-o'-war without the previous command of his superior officer—the boatswain hailed the little craft.

"Boat ahoy!" he shouted, with his lungs of brass and voice of a bull. "Ahoy! Ahoy-oy!"

No answer came, nor was there any movement amongst the boat's occupants, who were lying pell-mell along the thwarts and on the bottom boards in her sternsheets.

"Poor fellows, they must be all dead!" exclaimed the commodore, almost in my own words. "Mr Osborne, get a boat ready to send off and overhaul her!"

The officer of the watch, however, had already made preparations to this end, the first cutter's crew having been

piped and the men standing ready by the davits to lower her into the water, with the gripes cast off and the falls cleared.

"All ready there, coxsun, eh?" he cried; and then, without waiting for any answer, he sang out, "Lower away!"

Down glided the cutter into the water as the hands inboard eased off the falls; and, her crew having dropped their oars, the next minute she was pulling out towards the boat, which was now only some twenty yards or so off the ship, abreast of our mizzen-chains.

Of course, we could see from the ship all that went on as the cutter sheered up to the derelict craft. The bowman was standing up with his boathook ready to hook on when he got near enough, and Mr Osborne, the 'first luff,' standing up likewise astern to inspect the better the boat and its motionless occupants, he himself having gone away in the cutter, seeing how anxious the commodore seemed in the matter, instead of sending a young midshipman as usual.

Something strange must have happened, for, as our boat touched the other, we could hear a startled cry from Mr Osborne, followed by a sort of suppressed groan from the cutter's crew.

This reached the commodore's ear. "Cutter, ahoy!" he hailed. "Any one alive?"

"No, sir," came back the reply from Mr Osborne, in a sad tone. "All are dead—and a fearful death too!"

"Why," called out the commodore eagerly, as curious as all of us were, "what's the matter?"

"Struck by lightning, I think, sir," answered Mr Osborne, who held his handkerchief to his face and spoke in a stifled voice, after bending down and looking over into the sternsheets of the derelict. "Can't say exactly, sir. They're in an awful state!"

"Ho, bad job!" muttered the commodore aft, on the poop, as if talking to himself; and then in a louder key he sang out, "You'd better bring the boat alongside and let the doctor see them!"

Thereupon the bowman hitching the cutter's painter to the stem of the other boat which projected above the gunwale, and letting out the slack of the rope so as the boat should not come too close, Mr Osborne giving some order to that effect, they

took her in tow, and in a few strokes were alongside the ship again.

When they came up, there was no reason for any one to ask why the first lieutenant had held his handkerchief to his face.

The stench was abominable!

The doctor, who was ready and waiting at the ship's side, at once went down by the commodore's orders and examined the dead men, who we now saw were five in number, though they smelt like five hundred.

"Bedad, Tom," said Mick to me, as we looked down over the side, holding our noses—as, indeed, everybody on board was doing, every man-jack in the ship, I think, being on deck, from the old commodore down to the youngest middy and ship's boy—"Oi nivver smilt a shmell loike thet since me faither an' Oi wor at Clontarf whin they opened the graveyard theer, and toorned the owld coffins out wid the bones rattlin' aboot in thim jist loike pays in a pannikin, sure, whin we're goin' fur to make pay-soup, or pay doo, ez we used fur to call it aboard the owld *Saint Vincent!*"

Mr Osborne meanwhile had come up the side; and from where Mick and I were standing, by the mizzen-chains, I could hear distinctly every word he said, though I missed the first part, from Mick Donovan speaking to me at the moment, and he was in the middle of a sentence when I began to take in his words.

"—Must have been a terrible scrimmage, sir. One of the cutlasses seems covered with dry blood right up to the hilt; while the two dead chaps between the thwarts are cut about and carved in all directions. The lot of them, no doubt, were at it hammer and tongs when the flash came."

"Begorrah," whispered Mick in my ear, in comment on this statement, "it wor jist loike the two Kilkenny cats, sure, who fought till thaire wor ownly their tails lift, sure!"

The commodore, however, took a graver view of the matter.

"It must have been awfully sudden, Mr Osborne," he said; "and you think they were runaways or mutineers?"

"I'm sure of it," replied 'Number One' significantly. "There are a lot of gold coins and dollars scattered about in the bottom of the boat, besides an open bundle containing a collection of watches

and other jewellery; and, from the greasy pack of cards lying alongside these, I fancy they must have been playing for the plunder and quarrelled about the division of it!"

"Then the lightning came and settled the thing for good and all," said the commodore solemnly, sinking his voice to an impressive tone. "It was the judgment of God!"

The doctor, after a very brief stay in the boat, came up the side again and made his report to our chief.

"All of them must have been killed instanter by the one flash of lightning, which seems to have gone all over the boat, zigzagging in a most curious manner," said he. "The electric fluid, sir, has actually fused the blade of one of the cutlasses, and melted down the dollars and doubloons, which the poor devils must have been gambling with, all into a solid mass in the bottom of the boat!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir," affirmed the doctor, in answer to this exclamation from the commodore. "But the lightning, sir, has done something more wonderful than that, which I would not have believed unless I had seen it myself. I pulled open the shirt of one of the dead men, and there, on his breast, was a perfect photograph, as if done in Indian ink, of a ship in full sail, like the one which nearly collided with us the other day and afterwards foundered!"

"Pooh!" cried the commodore incredulously. "It is probably a tattoo mark, the same as all sailors like to deface their bodies with."

"Oh no, sir," persisted Doctor Mopson. "It's a real photograph printed by the flash of lightning. I've seen too many tattoo marks in my time while examining fellows in the sick-bay not to recognise them. This is plainly done by the electric fluid—you can see it for yourself, sir!"

"Thanks," said the commodore drily, walking to the other side of the deck and putting his silk handkerchief to his face, a very unpleasant whiff from the boat, which was still alongside, coming inboard. "I'll take your word for it, doctor, as you say it is so. I wonder if those fellows really belonged to that unfortunate ship?"

"Not unlikely, sir," said Mr Osborne, thinking the commodore, who had soliloquised aloud, according to his habit, had addressed the question to him. "The vessel did not seem to have a man on board her as far as I could see. Perhaps these dead beggars here plundered her and abandoned her after murdering their captain and officers!"

"Perhaps so," agreed our chief; "but, in any case, whether they have met with their just deserts or not—and for my part I am inclined to believe the former—we must give them Christian burial. I think, Mr Osborne, you had better let their boat be their coffin."

"By far the best plan, sir," put in the doctor, on the commodore looking towards him. "The lightning has so decomposed the corpses that it would be impossible to handle them, and it would be detrimental to the health of those touching them, too."

This decided the commodore, who thereupon gave orders that some pigs of ballast should be put within the boat, and that it should be afterwards boarded over with a few rough planks.

This, Mr Chips the carpenter, with the aid of his mates, quickly accomplished; and then the boat, with its ghastly contents now happily concealed from view, was drawn up half out of the water, suspended from one of the davits, and holes bored in the bottom.

When all was ready, the 'assembly' was sounded, and we all stood bareheaded along the deck, drawn up as at 'divisions,' while the chaplain read a brief funeral service; and, on the conclusion of this, the painter that held up the boat being severed, the coffin-craft sank slowly below the surface to the fathomless abysses of one of the deepest parts of the Atlantic—for I heard the navigating officer tell Mr Osborne that soundings had been got here showing a depth of over four miles.

The funeral finished, the hands were piped down; and then, our yards being squared again, we bore away once more for the Azores, reaching Saint Michael's a few days later, in company with the rest of the squadron.

This island, like the majority of the Azores, is of volcanic origin; and, looking at it from the sea, even when near in, it is not a very picturesque object, the conical hills and extinct craters giving it a monotonous, if mountainous, aspect.

We anchored off Ponta Delgado, about three-quarters of a mile off shore, in twenty-five fathom water, and, as we stopped there a couple of days, we were allowed short leave, each watch in turn, to land and see the sights.

These, beyond the flowers, which were beautiful from the effects of the volcanic soil, did not amount to much; and as the inhabitants are all Portuguese, whom we did not tackle to much, the ladies all wearing long cloaks with cowl-like hoods, the same as monks, which prevented us from seeing their faces, I can't say we enjoyed our visit to the town as greatly as we thought we would when we put off from the ship.

We obtained one acquisition here to our company however, which pleased all hands.

This was a little black wiry monkey that originally came from the Spanish Main, I believe, being landed at Ponta Delgado by some passing ship; and which Doctor Mopson brought on board, from "motives of humanity," as he said, having seen its Portugee owner ill-treating it, and, besides, on account of his being "long desirous of dissecting this specimen of the simian family," as I heard him tell that brute Lieutenant Robinson, who I saw enjoyed the prospect of seeing the poor little thing cut up.

The doctor, though, had only spoken in joke, he being a most good-hearted chap who would not have hurt a fly, except inadvertently, should he happen to have to treat the animal professionally; so, instead of being dissected, 'Jocko,' as he was christened, was made free of the ship, and presently became a prime favourite with all on board.

He was certainly a clever little chap, performing all sorts of tricks, and being up to all sorts of mischief.

"Begorrah," as Mick said, "he can do ivv'rythin' save spake; an' thet the artful joker won't do, faith, bekase he thinks, sure, we'll make him wurrk!"

One day on our passage home to England, 'Jocko' got into as great disgrace as I did that time when I was 'caught in the act,' smoking, on board the *Saint Vincent*.

Master monkey, if you please, managed to get into the chaplain's cabin through the scuttle, the door being locked on purpose to prevent his intrusion.

It was on a Saturday when this occurred, a day the Reverend Mr Tibbits devoted to composing his usual Sunday sermon, which lay on his desk neatly written out on the usual official foolscap; the worthy gentleman having just completed his task of attending to our spiritual needs on the morrow, and being then engaged in recruiting his own inner man, after his arduous labours, with lunch in the wardroom mess.

Hence, the chaplain's temporal necessity was Jocko's opportunity.

Seeing the fine field open for the exercise of his ingenious imagination, Jocko set to work as speedily as possible, to see what havoc he could make in the short time the sagacious animal knew he had at his disposal; and he seized hold in some way or other of a big quart bottle of ink which the chaplain kept for a reserve stock on top of the bookcase at the side—at least so it was thought afterwards, no one, of course, having seen him do it.

This, with an artistic idea of effect, the monkey poured liberally, not only over the sermon and other papers that lay on the table, but on the reverend gentleman's sheets as well, Jocko probably thinking a black colour would be more suitable and in keeping with the clerical garments that hung from some clothes-pegs adjacent.

Next, Mr Jocko appropriated the chaplain's Bible, and 'diligently searched the Scriptures' for some time, with great care tearing out those leaves, and there were many, containing passages which particularly struck his fancy.

A large prayer-book, whose type or binding offended him in some way or other, he took up with his paws and very carefully dropped through the scuttle, to refresh the souls of the fishes below.

What mischief he might have done further, no one knows; for at that moment the chaplain opened the door and interrupted Jocko at his devotional exercises.

From the yell he gave out, as the wardroom steward subsequently detailed, the Reverend Mr Tibbits must have believed His Satanic Majesty was in possession of his cabin; and, on his realising the character of his visitor properly, ere he could clutch hold of Jocko, who was then chattering away in high glee and making hideous faces, his invariable habit when he expected punishment after some evil deed as now, the agile



monkey, gripping a portion of the ink-sodden sermon in one paw, and the chaplain's black velvet skull-cap in the other, vanished through the open scuttle by which he had obtained admittance, proceeding up the side as nimbly as one of the foretopmen to the crosstrees aloft, where he put on the skull-cap and very possibly pondered over all that he had done.

He had reason to; for a fiat of banishment from the wardroom and its approaches was the sequel to his escapade, in addition to a severe thrashing after he was caught, which it took the watch the whole afternoon to effect, Jocko playing a fine game of 'follow my leader' up the shrouds and down the stays, from one end of the ship to the other, until, tired out at last, he surrendered and took his flogging, like a monkey if not like a man.

Exiled from aft the main-hatchway, Mr Jocko took up his quarters with the boatswain, who offered to assume charge of him when Doctor Mopson gave him up as a bad job and the other officers repudiated him; and, being now able to associate with us forward more freely, he quickly learnt all manner of new tricks, using a glass, for instance, as well as a signalman, and another sort of glass, especially if it contained grog, as expertly as Joblins did, when he had the chance.

On our voyage home from the Azores he afforded rare fun to all of us, the men dressing him up in regular sailor rig, and the carpenter's mate carving a rifle and sword-bayonet for him out of a bit of wood that was handy.

With this, Jocko used to take his place with the starboard watch when we beat to quarters, and the men would come hurrying up on deck hastily with their weapons each to his station.

You should only have seen him sight his rifle and pretend to aim at an imaginary enemy; while at the order to 'repel boarders' he would drop down in a half-sitting posture, looking as comical as possible, holding his sword-bayonet at the charge.

On these occasions he would always range himself by the side of Mick, whom he selected in preference to all the rest of the ship's company as his chosen associate.

The boatswain noticed this; and one day in the early part of April, as we were coming up Channel on our return from our cruise and nearing Spithead, being just abreast of the projecting headland of Dunose on the south side of the Isle of Wight, Mr

Blockley comes up to Mick as he and I and Jocko were standing on the forecastle.

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## **Chapter Twenty One.**

### **I Become an "Ordinary Seaman."**

"Tell us, Donovan," said he—"now, what would you do with that monkey, supposing I make him over to you?"

"Faith," replied Mick, not knowing whether the boatswain was trying to take a rise out of him or not, "Oi wudn't ate him, sor."

"I suppose not," said Mr Blockley, grinning, as Mick did, in sympathy. "But would you take care of him, my lad, if I give the monkey to you?"

"An' is it whither Oi'll take care ov him ye're afther axin' me?" said my chum, taking hold of Jocko as he spoke. "Begorrah, ye jist coom to me arrums, ye little baiste, and show Mистер Blockley how fond yez are ov me, ye divvle!"

Jocko, who had been standing in front of: the pair at the time on the forecastle in the position of 'present arms,' holding his little wooden rifle as correctly as the smartest drilled marine, at once dropped this on the deck, and sprang, not into Mick's arms, but on to his left shoulder, where he chattered and grimaced away, no doubt telling his chosen friend in the choicest monkey language how much he loved him.

This was proof to Mr Blockley of the affection that existed between the two; so, without further demur, he made over all right and title he might possess in Jocko to Mick.

"But, you're sure, my lad, you'll take good care of him," he said. "I wouldn't like any harm to come to the poor little beggar. The doctor gave him to me on the understanding that he would be well looked after, and on the same conditions I trust him now to you."

"Faith, sor, ye couldn't do botther," replied Mick, caressing Jocko with much satisfaction, evidently proud to be his real owner. "Sure, an' if Oi've got to go to say ag'in an' can't look afther the baiste mesilf, it's some 'un ilse Oi'll be afther givin' him to thet'll say to him aven betther nor mesilf!"

"And who's that?" inquired the boatswain, with a laugh, noticing a flush come over Mick's face. "You know I'm interested in the monkey and have a sort of right to ask."

Mick looked 'nine ways for Sunday,' to use his own favourite expression.

"Bedad, sor," he at length replied sheepishly, "it's Jenny, sor."

"But," persisted Mr Blockley, smelling a rat, "who's Jenny?"

"Tom's sisther, sure."

"O-o-oh!"

Not being certain exactly as to the meaning of Mr Blockley's ejaculation, Mick went on to explain further.

"Yis, sor, she's the sisther, sure, ov me fri'nd Tom Bowlin' here, sor," he said, pointing me out by a punch in the ribs that nearly knocked all the breath out of me. "An', sure, she's moighty fond ov burrds!"

Mr Blockley laughed.

"From that, I suppose, Paddy," he said, as soon as he could speak, "you put Jocko here in the same boat as the birds?"

"Begorrah, Oi do, sor," replied Mick, with a broad grin, as he cuddled the monkey up to him in his arms; Jocko taking off Mick's cap the while, and carefully scattering its motley contents to the winds. "Oi call him, sure, a Saint Michael's canary, faith, sor!"

"You'll do," said Mr Blockley, laughing again as he went away to attend to his duties, in seeing the chain cables got up from below, and ranged along the lower deck in preparation for our anchoring anon. "Let alone an Irishman for having the last word!"

Having a good breeze with us from the southward and westward, we soon rounded Saint Helen's point, off the east end of the island; and making a wide reach in towards the Warner lightship, we brought up at Spithead at Four Bells, comfortably.

Just before we anchored, Mr Osborne, the first lieutenant, sent for Mick and myself, the marine who passed the word forward

for us, saying that 'Number One' wanted to see us in the wardroom.

Wondering what was up, my chum and I proceeded aft, where we found Mr Osborne seated at the table, having just had lunch, as the cloth showed.

'Number One,' who had evidently enjoyed his meal, being in a genial mood, as indeed, to give him his due, he usually was, did not keep us long in suspense.

"Ha, my lads," he said, on the sentry ushering us up to where he sat, "you've given in your names, I believe, to pass for ordinary seamen, eh?"

The cat was out of the bag at once, and mightily we felt relieved at that.

I could not help smiling as I answered Mr Osborne in the affirmative; while, as for Mick, his "Yis, sor," was rolled out with an emphasis that made 'Number One' laugh outright.

"I hear very good reports of both of you, my lads—of you Bowling in particular," he said, looking at some papers before him, which he signed and handed over to the marine sentry, telling him to send them on to the ship's office; "and, as you are now both eighteen, the proper age to be entered on the books as 'ordinary seamen,' and have shown your aptitude for the service during the six months you have been aboard this ship, I pass you, my lads, so you may now look upon yourselves as 'boys' no longer!"

Thanking the lieutenant, we left the wardroom, as may be supposed, decorously enough; but we had no sooner got out on the dock without than Mick executed a wild caper, which made the sentry grin.

"Bedad, Tom," he said, loud enough for the marine to hear, "me fayther allers s'id Oi'd be a man afore me moother; an', faith, Oi'm thet now, plaize the pigs!"

It was certainly a most unexpected dénouement to the ordeal we had expected when sending in our names, both of us thinking we would have had to pass some stiff grind in seamanship and other naval acquirements, similar to the examinations we used to undergo on board the old *Saint Vincent*; and as we now were rated really as seamen, with the pay of one shilling and threepence a day, instead of

sevenpence, besides having all the dirty work of the ship taken off our hands, Mick and I considered ourselves in clover, as you may readily imagine!

The *Active* and *Volage*, the two Portsmouth ships of the Training Squadron, went into harbour early the very next morning, laying alongside the dockyard as before, to refit for their summer cruise; and, later on, when we were moored in our old berth at the Pitch-House jetty and things made right on board, we got leave with the rest of the starboard watch to go ashore, Mick, of course, going home with me, and Jocko equally, of course, forming one of the company.

On our reaching Bonfire Corner, Mick was in a fix about Jocko, apparently, eyeing him when we got near the door of father's cottage, and then looking at me with a puzzled expression on his face, the monkey saving him the trouble of scratching his head, which Mick had got into the habit of doing whenever he was in a quandary, by most affectionately performing the operation for him.

"Hullo, old chap," said I, "what's up?"

"Faith, Tom, Oi'm onaisy in me moind, sure, about Jocko," he replied. "Oi don't want yer sisther to be afther sayin' him at foorst. Sure, Oi want to take her be surprise, alannah."

"Well," said I, "that needn't trouble you, Mick. Let's put the little beggar over the garden wall."

"But, s'posin' onywun's theer?"

"You needn't be afraid of that," said I. "Mother and Jenny will be just having tea about this time, most likely, in the kitchen; and, if father's at home and not out in his wherry, he'll be taking a caulk in his old seat under the mulberry-tree."

"Begorrah, thin," cried Mick, in high glee at my now giving him this information, "we'll put the little baiste roight over the wall forninst whare he's a-sottin'; an', faith, if Jocko says him, he'll rouse him oop fast enuff, an' thin yer fayther'll think he's the divvle, sure, jist ez the chaplin did aboard the ship t'other day whin Jocko got into his cabin an' carried on 'Meg's divarshuns'!"

"The very thing," I said, entering into the joke and anticipating father's astonishment. "Sling him over by that apple-tree, and then nobody will be able to see how he got in."

Mick at once carried out my suggestion.

The apple-tree, which had all its pretty pink and white blossoms out in full bloom, ran up close to the side of the wall, one branch indeed projecting over it, though at too great a height for the street boys to get at the fruit, having to content themselves instead with shying stones at what they were unable to reach.

Clambering up the face of the rough old brick wall like a cat, Mick carefully let down Jocko on the other side at this point, telling him in a whispered word of command that he was on 'sentry go' and mustn't stir till the order was given to 'relieve guard.'

Jocko evidently understood him clearly; for, although I expected he would have climbed back again on Mick's shoulder almost as soon as he put him down, the intelligent animal remained in the garden.

All things therefore working together as we wished, Mick and I now proceeded up to the front door and knocked.

Unfortunately, father had seen the *Active* coming in and "blown the gaff" on us; and so, instead of our taking them by surprise, we found them on the lookout and all ready to receive us.

Little Jenny, who had grown considerably since I had last seen her, and was all the prettier, too, as Mick, I noticed, observed as well as myself, of course opened the door for us; and coming up the passage behind her was mother and father, with the cockatoo 'Ally Sloper' bringing up the roar of the procession, all of them laughing and talking, and saying, all in one breath and at the same time, how glad they were to see me and Mick again, old 'Ally Sloper' screaming out louder than the lot, "I'll wring your neck! I'll wring your neck!" We did have a tea.

To look at the table, one would have thought we had been starved all the time we were afloat, and that mother wished us to make up what leeway we had lost in the grub line by stowing our holds now as full as we could possibly manage.

Bless you, there was a dish of ham and eggs got ready by Jenny in a jiffy, sufficient to have served round the whole of our mess; while, as for the bread and butter, cut thin so as to make one want to eat the more, with marmalade and cakes and the jam, there was plenty, I think, for our whole ship's company!

Mick and I ate and ate, I pressed by mother, and he unable to resist Jenny's hospitable solicitude, until neither of us felt inclined to rise; when, just at the end of the feast—Mick and I being only just able then to make signs showing our inability to stow any more, speech having failed us—a most terrible bobbery broke out in the back garden, the cockatoo yelling like mad, and every other bird, I believe, in the shop joining in a demoniac chorus and lending emphasis to his screams.

"Ship my rullocks!" cried father, jumping up from his seat and making for the scullery door, with mother and Jenny after him. "It's that dratted old tom-cat of Bill Squeers come prowling arter the birds again, I knows. I've sworn I'll pison him some day; and, by the Lord, too, I will, if he's bin and gone and meddled with 'Ally Sloper'!"

"Aye, Thomas Bowling, just you stick to that," said mother, spurring him on to instant vengeance, fearing that father's loudly expressed animosity to our namesake the cat would evaporate, as it invariably did, after the cause of the commotion had made off. "The nasty beast nearly frightened one of Jenny's canaries to death the other day; but I gave him one with my broom-handle which made him scoot, I can tell you, the brute not having come back into the garden again, as I knows of, till to-day!"

So saying, mother disappeared, with her potent broomstick, behind the hedge of evergreens that shut off the backyard from our garden, in the wake of father and Jenny, who, being more speedy in their movements, were already out of sight.

Mick looked at me, and I looked at Mick; and then the two of us burst into a roar of laughter as we followed up the chase to see the end of it.

We arrived just in time.

Jocko, who, as may be supposed, was the originator of all the row, had got up into the mulberry-tree, the cockatoo's own especial domain, and, chattering and making faces at the bird, had clutched hold of one of his legs in his hand-like paw, trying to pull him from his perch.

This 'Ally Sloper' resisted with all his might and main, hanging from a branch of the tree with the claw that was free, while he pecked and bit the monkey with his nut-cracker beak, making Jocko wince and snarl and pull all the harder to get him into his

clutches, the cockatoo screaming like mad, as I have said, all the while!

"Lor'!" exclaimed mother, holding up her hands at this sight, just as we came up, "it ain't Squeers's cat after all! How ever did that there monkey get here?"

"It must have broken loose from some place near," said Jenny. "The milkman told me this morning that Smith, the fancier, had one the other day which crammed a lot of cinders down the baby's throat and nearly killed it, and that Mr Smith was obliged to get rid of it."

"Then, this can't be that chap," said father, sitting down in his old armchair under the tree and looking up at Jocko, who had released 'Ally Sloper' on our approach and gone up aloft in one of the topmost branches. "I'd bet 'arf-a-crown now, Sarah, as how them two youngsters here could tell us summat o' the monkey if they likes!"

He had a sharp eye, had father, and had caught Mick winking at me.

So, there being now no longer any need, or indeed chance, of concealment, especially with Jenny's eyes fixed on him, Mick thought it best to make a clean breast of it at once.

"Coom down out o' thet, ye divvle. 'Tenshin, Jocko!" cried he, patting his shoulder, to which his friend the monkey at once jumped from the tree; and then, turning to my sister, he said, with a roguish look in his black eyes, "Oi've brought ye a little prisint, Miss Jenny, ez Oi hopes ez how ye'll be afther acceptin'."

Jenny smiled.

"What," said she—"a monkey?"

"No, Miss Jenny," replied Mick, grinning, while Jocko chattered in sympathetic glee. "He ain't a monkey at all, at all. Sure, he's what I calls a Saint Michael's canary!"

This was a settler for all of them; father leaning back in his chair and holding his sides, while mother and Jenny enjoyed the joke as much as we could both wish, 'Ally Sloper' adding to the merriment of us all by shrieking out at intervals alternately, "Say-rah! Say-rah!" and "Blest if I don't have a smoke!" in father's very own voice.



On returning to the *Active* after our leave was up, Mick and I were sent to the guardship, or depot, having to leave our old ship through getting our new rating as ordinary seamen, we having been drafted to her as 'boys'; for, being no longer held to be such, we, of course, had no 'local habitation or name,' according to the saying, on board her.

We did not have much of a stay at home, however, all the same, Mick getting appointed within the next fortnight to the flagship on the Cape station, when he and I parted for the first time since we became chums, more than two years previously, on our joining the *Saint Vincent* together.

A sailor's life, though, is made up of partings, not only with one another, but with the old folks at home as well, and sometimes with certain persons even dearer than these; so, wringing my hand in his hearty grip and leaving a tender farewell for Jenny, whom he was unable to see before going away, she being on a visit to a cousin of ours who lived at Chichester, Mick and I said good-bye to one another. Really, I envied his luck of getting the chance of seeing active service so soon!

I did not have to envy him long; for, a week later, I was turned over to the *Mermaid*, a new second-class cruiser just commissioned to join the eastern division of the Mediterranean Fleet, to take the place for the time of one of the smaller ships belonging to the squadron, under refit at Malta, our orders being then to proceed to the Red Sea, where it was expected that Osman Digna would be making matters warm in and about Suakin later on in the year.

Some three days subsequently to my going on board her, with a complete new rig-out, bag, baggage, and all, the *Mermaid* sailed for the Straits; if sailing it can be called in a ship going by steam alone, and which had not a royal-yard to cross, or any other spars to speak of aloft for that matter, the cruiser being rigged to carry fore-and-aft sail in case of emergency should her engines break down.

It might be thought from this that my early training in a sailing-ship was thrown away, there being no longer any necessity for me to display my activity in racing up the rigging and running out on a yard to reef topsails.

The contrary, however, was the case; and I've found, even during my short experience afloat—ay, and in spite of the ridiculous assertions of some shore folk, who know about as much of life in the navy as they do to club-haul a ship off a lee

shore—that the men who have learnt to hold on by the skin of their teeth in a heavy gale, from the aptitude they have gained in the old-fashioned class of ships, are the handiest and the readiest at a pinch in the new!

Of course, though, I only found out this afterwards; as on first joining the *Mermaid* the ship was as strange to me as I, sore at parting with Mick, felt myself a complete stranger to all on board.

So I thought, at least.

But I was mistaken.

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## Chapter Twenty Two.

### An Old Acquaintance.

"Hullo!" exclaimed a voice that seemed very familiar to me, on my getting down to the mess-deck below with my bag, when I had got my number, and been told off to my watch and division. "Who'd ha' thought o' meeting yer here?"

The speaker was a broad-shouldered chap, with a lot of hair all over his face, and I did not recognise him for the moment.

"You've got the advantage of me, mate," said I civilly, not wishing to hurt his feelings if he had made a mistake in addressing me, as I believed he had. "I can't place you."

"Lor', carn't yer?" replied the chap, with a broad grin stealing over his face. "I fancies, Tom Bowlin', I hed th' adwantage on yer onst, an' placed yer too, that time I cut yer down in yer hammick aboard the *Saint Vincent*, hey, old ship?"

It was Larrikins.

Needless to say how glad I was to meet him again, or what yarns we had to tell each other of what had happened to us respectively since last we met.

He was the same frolicsome, good-tempered chap that he had been on board the training-ship, I found, after a very few minutes' talk; but his love of practical-joking had been sobered

down a bit within due bounds, and, on the whole, he was very much improved in every way.

"I s'pose ye've never bin aboard a hooker like this afore," he said to me presently, after we had made an end of exchanging reminiscences, noticing that I was all at loggerheads in finding my way below. "It's them bloomin' watertight compartments as does it; but come along o' me, Tom, and I'll show yez the ropes."

So saying, he took me over the ship, pointing out how the *Mermaid* had a steel-protected deck running fore and aft, that sheltered her engines and boilers beneath; the space in beneath this and the bottom of the vessel being subdivided by a series of vertical iron bulkheads, completely shutting off the various 'flats,' or lower decks, from each other.

An arrangement so complex naturally necessitated a fellow having to climb up one hatchway and go down another before he could speak to his chum in the next flat, thus causing one to go through 'sich a getting upstairs' like that mentioned in the celebrated negro ballad. The difference of the deck plan of a modern cruiser, as compared with that of my old ship the *Active*, was not the only thing I had to learn on being drafted to the *Mermaid*; for the drills were quite as strange to me at first as her complicated build inboard.

The stokers, of course, had to see to driving her through the water, that being their special duty, under the superintendence of the engineers; so, as this job was taken out of the hands of us bluejackets, and there was nothing for us to do in the way of setting and taking in sail, the executive officers managed to find other work for us to keep our minds from mischief when we were aboard.

One of these tasks was 'collision mat' drill; when we would be tumbled up on deck to rig out a roll of oakum that was plaited into the semblance of a gigantic doormat, right over the side, dragging it by means of guys and springs under our forefoot, to fill up some imaginary hole that had been knocked into us by too friendly a craft passing by and running athwart our hawse!

Another favourite drill in vogue with the johnnies of our new regime was that of 'closing watertight doors.'

The signal for this being about to be carried out was the blowing of a particularly excruciating sort of foghorn at some unexpected hour of the day or night—it used to be in every

watch on the *Mermaid*; and at the sound of this melodious instrument, which was most likely selected by the authorities in recollection of the story of Joshua and his trumpet, the 'walls,' or, rather, bulkheads, of the ship did not 'come down,' but were run up!

By this means every compartment throughout the ship was isolated and all communication cut off between the various flats.

The officers were shut into their wardroom; the engineers and stokers in their own special domain; and the men forward, perhaps, on their mess-deck; until the officer of the watch had made the rounds and those in charge of the respective watertight doors had affirmed the fact, from personal supervision, that all these were closed, when, this gratifying intelligence was communicated to the captain, and he gave the order to open them again.

In addition to these exercises, there was the old 'fire quarters' drill, to which I was accustomed; and 'man and arm ship,' when all of us hurried to our stations on the main-deck batteries—those who formed part, that is, of the crews of the several guns of different types we had aboard; while the rest of us lined the sides of the upper deck, prepared to pepper away with our rifles at any approaching foe, and repel, with our sword-bayonets at the 'charge,' all possible boarders.

We had about a week's cruising in the Channel, to knock us into shape as well as test our machinery, the *Mermaid* being a new vessel and not long delivered over from the contractors; but, Captain Hankey being a smart officer, besides being ably seconded by his subordinates, this was so satisfactorily achieved, as regards both ship and men, that ere we reached old Gib, whose couching lion-head facing out to sea reminded me strongly of the more familiar Bill of Portland, any one inspecting us would really have thought the *Mermaid* an old stager and that our raw company had been working together for months, instead of only a week or two!

'Old Hankey Pankey,' though, as he was called on the lower deck—sailors having always a nickname for their officers, whether they like them or dislike them—possessed the rare art of managing those under his command to such a degree that he would have turned out a likely enough crew from much worse material; while he 'got to win'ard' of the engineers so cleverly that they never grumbled at any orders he gave—unlike those gentry in general—thus enabling us to pile on steam and make the passage out from England in far less time than we expected,

there being no complaints from the stokehold of 'leaking tubes' and 'priming' boilers necessitating our having to 'slow down.'

After passing through the Gut of Gibraltar, we made for Malta; which place seems to have such a magnetic attraction for our men-of-war, both homeward and outward bound, that none by any chance ever gives it the go-by, there being always some little defect to 'make good,' or despatches to wait for, or letters to post, or something that obliges them to cast anchor in Valetta harbour, if they are only allowed to remain an hour or two!

We fortunately stopped here for three days; and, though the men generally were not given leave ashore, Larrikins and I, being both in the first cutter, we had the chance of landing more than once.

We had a bit of fun, too, on one of these occasions when going up the Nix Mangiare stairs, leading up from the place where the men-of-war boats put in to the town above.

These stairs are so named, it may be explained for the benefit of those who have not been there, from being the haunt of a number of beggars who frequent the steep ascent, demanding alms of all bluejackets and others that may chance to pass up or down, their whining plea being that they have nothing to eat— "Nix mangiare, buono Johnny, nix mangiare!"

We had already been accosted by three or four of these chaps, to each of whom we had given a trifle, moved by their poverty-stricken appearance and Maltese whine; when, on reaching the top of the steps, an old fellow, who from his venerable look seemed above that sort of thing, repeated a like request to his compeers lower down the stairs, holding out the palm of a lean clawlike hand resembling one of Jocko's paws.

"No, no, that won't wash," said Larrikins, in a chaffy way, catching hold of a fine-looking malacca cane the old fellow was leaning on, and which seemed more fit for a grand seignior than a beggar. "None of your bono johnnies with me, you old reprobate. Yer oughter be ashamed on yerself, yer ought, axing fur charity from poor sailors like we—you with this fine walkin'-stick here, good enough for 'old Hankey Pankey' hisself!"

With that, Larrikins, wrenching the malacca from the unwilling hands of the old fellow, gave it a shake in the air as if he were going to apply it to the shoulders of its owner.

"By jingo," I cried out, "there's something chinking in it that sounds like money, Larry!"

"Lor', it is money, Tom," exclaimed Larrikins, at once giving the stick a good bash against the side of the wall. "The thunderin' old cheat of a Maltese scoundrel is a regular take-in, askin' on us fur to help him and he a-rollin' in gold all the time, the blessed old miser!"

This statement was true enough; for, as the malacca cane came against the stonework, the head of it flew off, and from the hollow cavity within that was then disclosed there rolled out, if you please, a string of gold pieces some twenty at least in number—the result, probably, of this respectable mendicant's very industrious beggary since he had taken to the trade, the old rascal carrying his horde about with him for safety's sake.

He now burst into tears at his secret wealth being thus brought to light; judging, no doubt, from what he knew of the morals of his own countrymen, that Larrikins and I were going to appropriate it to our own use.

But, Larrikins and I were English sailors—not any of your Maltese riffraff; and so, picking up the scattered gold, we gave it back to the old impostor, the suspicious scoundrel counting each piece as we dropped it into his hands to make sure that we did not purloin any.

"Take that, yer old joker," said Larrikins, as we left the scene of the incident, tendering the old gentleman a parting kick. "That's some interest, old Bono Johnny, to stick inter yer ditty box along o' yer shiners!"

We had no further adventure at Malta, beyond finding out that most of the shopkeepers and other chaps with whom we dealt during our short stay were as great cheats as our beggar friend of the Nix Mangiare stairs.

Before leaving the port, however, to proceed up the Levant, we heard a piece of news that gave some of us much satisfaction.

This was, that, instead of the *Mermaid* having to act for some months as jackal to the eastern division of the fleet, as had been intended when we were commissioned, we were now ordered to pass up the Mediterranean and proceed on through to the Red Sea, the cruiser which we had been hurriedly despatched to relieve on account of her condenser being cracked, having had her damages made good in the dockyard,

the *Merlin* indeed lying out in French Creek all ready to return to her station within forty-eight hours of our arrival at Valetta.

So, on the third morning, a lot of signalling went on between our ship and the flagstaff ashore at the naval station, the upshot being that we were ordered to sail early in the afternoon; when, steam being got up and the anchor weighed, we bade adieu to the island, leaving Saint Elmo Point on our port hand and shaping a course eastward.

When we were nearing Alexandria, we had a bit of a 'Levanter,' which delayed our progress for half a day, during which time we had to slow down our engines and keep under easy steam, head to sea; but, after that, the weather was as fine as we could wish, and we got through the Canal without a hitch, not a single vessel blocking us, even after passing the Bitter Lakes, a very unusual thing at this period of the year, when the China clippers crowd the narrow waterway and cause repeated stoppages as a rule to ships outward bound.

On emerging from the Canal, at Suez, we made the best of our way down the Red Sea to Suakin, where we found despatches from the senior officer of the East African station, to which we were attached, directing us to join him off the island of Socotra; and that if we did not come across him there we were to cruise along the coast between Ras Hafim and Obbia, where it was reported the Somali Arabs were getting busy with the advent of the south-west monsoon, and carting cargoes of slaves over to Oman and the Persian Gulf—that is, when they saw a chance and none of our men-of-war were on the spot to stop them!

In obedience to these instructions, therefore, we steamed steadily onwards through the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, and, making a wide stretch across the Gulf of Aden to take advantage of the current, steered straight for our appointed rendezvous.

Here, finding no one to meet us, nor hearing any news of import to alter our programme, Captain Hankey hauled up for Cape Guardafui, intending then to beat down the Somali coast as he had been directed.

Seeing the funnels of a steamer awash off Binna, we put in nearer to the shore, the steam cutter being piped away to examine the wreck, which was too close in to the rocks for the *Mermaid* to approach her with safety.

There was no trace of any one living on board, though she had evidently been only recently abandoned, various articles lying about on the deck aft, which was clear of the water, that would not have remained long aboard had she been stranded for any length of time.

She was clean gutted, however, almost every single movable thing of any value having been stripped from her.

"Ha!" I heard Captain Hankey say to our first lieutenant, both of them coming in the cutter to inspect the steamer. "Those Somali Arabs have been here, Gresham."

"Not a doubt of it, sir," replied Mr Gresham. "Those beggars are the biggest thieves, I believe, in the world; and murderous rascals, too. I recollect, sir, when I was out here in the old *Vampire*, we had many a tussle with them, for they fight like wild cats!"

"Aye, they do that," said the captain. "I shouldn't be surprised if some of their dhows are knocking about here now!"

"Nor I, sir," agreed the other. "Oliver, of the *Magpie*, whom I saw at Suakin, told me there was a rumour of the Somalis running cargoes of arms, which they pick up somewhere in the German protectorate, to supply Osman Digna's forces for a fresh campaign that has been planned by the Arabs against us along the whole coast."

"That may be," said Captain Hankey; "but the beggars who have been at work here wore only on the lookout for loot, I think—though, perhaps, they may have murdered the crew and passengers of this vessel, too, for all we know. However, to make matters sure, we'll look out for them!"

"Aye, aye, sir, that will prevent any mistakes," said Mr Gresham, with a laugh. "I don't think any Arab dhow, whether belonging to the Somalis or otherwise, can escape the *Mermaid*, should one heave in sight!"

There being nothing that we could do for the steamer, which would have to be 'written off as a loss' by the underwriters at Lloyd's, the captain gave the signal for the cutter to return to our ship; and then, making a good offing, so as to put the Arabs off their guard, we banked our fires, except under one boiler, keeping the screw just revolving so as to maintain our position abreast of Binna, well out of sight of the land.



A strict watch was maintained, though, all the same, lookouts being stationed in our military tops as well as on the forecastle; and, in the early morning, long before sunrise, the steam pinnacle and first and second cutters were lowered alongside, and provisioned ready for action.

Captain Hankey had kept his eyes open to some purpose when he inspected the steamer, for he had seen a lot of things that had been stripped off the vessel put together in a heap under the bridge, as if her plunderers intended returning for them, not having been able to carry them away at their last trip; and, albeit he did not draw the attention of our first lieutenant to this, to my knowledge, when talking to him, no doubt, from the preparations he made, 'old Hankey Pankey' drew his own conclusions.

His judgment was not at fault.

Hardly had the first flush of dawn tinted the yellow eastern sky with its rosy light, heralding the glowing heat of day, ere one of the men stationed in the tops hailed the deck.

"There's something moving away off on our weather bow," sang out the man, shoving his head over the side of the top. "I can't make it out exactly, sir; there's a haze on the water ahead."

The second lieutenant, who was acting as officer of the watch, being an easy-going sort of chap and rather sleepy from being up pacing to and fro on the bridge since midnight, did not pay much attention to this intelligence.

"All right, lookout-man," he hailed back, after a portentous yawn. "It's probably the morning breeze blowing the fog off the land that you see. Tell me, a-a-ah! When you are able to make it out more clearly, a-a-ah!"

And, he almost yawned himself out of his boots as he gave utterance to the last word.

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## **Chapter Twenty Three.**

### **Boarding the Slave Dhow.**

"On deck, there!" shouted out the lookout-man again, almost before the sound of Lieutenant Dabchick's last yawn had died

away in the distance, like a groan or its echo. "There's a whole fleet o' dhows a-creeping up under the lee of the land and running before the wind to the north'ard, sir!"

This stopped Mr Dabchick's yawns and made him open his sleepy eyes pretty wide, I can tell you!

"A fleet of dhows, lookout-man!" he cried, fully awake at last, not only in his own person, but as regarded the responsibility attaching to him should he unhappily let our prey escape and so foil his captain's carefully arranged plan. "Are you certain, Adams?"

"Not a doubt of it, sir," replied the captain of the foretop, in an assured tone that expressed his confidence in his own statement. "They're Arab dhows sure enough, sir. One—two—three; and, ay, there is two more on 'em jist rounding the p'int—that makes five on 'em, sir, all bearing to the north as fast as they can go, with slack sheets and the breeze dead astern, which they are bringing up with them. They're right off our weather beam, now, sir."

"The devil!" ejaculated Lieutenant Dabchick, in his flurry using a stronger expression than he would probably have done had 'old Hankey Pankey' been on the quarter-deck, rushing into the chart-house on the bridge and snatching up a telescope, which he brought to bear on the horizon in the direction indicated by Adams in the foretop above, whose point of vantage, of course, gave him a wider range of view. "On our weather beam, you say?"

"Ay, ay, sir," roared back the lookout; "they're right abreast of our forrud funnel now, sir."

Mr Dabchick's hand shook so much from excitement that he could not hold the glass steady; so, propping it up athwart the stanchion at the weather end of the bridge, and sprawling out his legs to give him a good purchase, he worked the telescope about till he at last spotted the objects Adams had seen.

"By the Lord Harry!" exclaimed the lieutenant, "you are right, Adams. I must send down and tell the captain at once."

With that, he hailed the midshipman of the watch and despatched him with the news to Captain Hankey's cabin aft; while at the same time he rang the engine-room gong, and shouted down through the voice-tube to tell them below to 'stand by,' as probably we would want steam up in a very short

time; directing also the coxswains of the boats alongside to make ready, as well as passing the word forward for the boatswain's mates and the drummer and bugler to be handy when wanted.

This done, all his orders having been issued and executed in less time than I take to tell of it, Mr Dabchick resumed his interrupted, if monotonous, task of walking up and down the bridge; stopping whenever he had to slew round, at the end of his promenade, to take another squint at the dhows, and warning Adams, though that worthy needed no such injunction, to 'keep his eye on them.'

Mr Dabchick had just sung out this for the second time on getting back to the weather end of the bridge, when Captain Hankey, accompanied by Mr Gresham and a lot of the other officers, rushed on deck, some of them half dressed and buckling on their gear as they came hurrying along.

'Old Hankey Pankey' made straight for the bridge, the first lieutenant close at his heels.

"Ha, Mr Dabchick," cried the captain, as he skated up the iron ladder leading from the deck below to the chart-house, taking three steps at each bound, "so you've sighted those beggars at last, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said the second lieutenant, smiling, and rubbing his hands, having put down his telescope on top of the movable slab on the bridge the navigator had for spreading out his charts; Mr Dabchick assuming an air of great complacency, as if it were entirely through his exertions the dhows had been seen or were there at all—"I think you'll find 'em there to win'ard all right, sir."

'Old Hankey Pankey' caught up the telescope that Mr Dabchick had just deposited on the slab, putting it to his eye.

"Yes, they are dhows sure enough, Gresham," he said to the first lieutenant, after a brief inspection of the craft, which were stealing past us under the loom of the land far away to the westward. "No doubt, they are the very rascals who plundered the wreck we saw yesterday, and as likely as not murdered all the people on board! They are making for the same spot again, too, to pick up the rest of the loot they have not yet taken off; but we'll stop their little game. Bugler, sound the 'assembly'! Drummer, beat to 'quarters'!"

The blare of bugle and beat of drum rang through the ship, mingled with the hiss and roar of the steam rushing up the funnels; the captain, as he sang out his orders to those on deck, mechanically, from force of habit, putting his hand on the engine-room telegraph to prepare the 'greasers' in the flat below, and rapidly shouting down the voice-tube, as soon as the electric bell on the bridge gave a responsive tinkle, that they were to 'get up steam' as quickly as possible.

But, there was no fear of our alarming the enemy with the noise of our preparations, not even when the boatswain's mates added their quota to the din after the bugle was sounded. They were too far off, and, besides, we were to leeward, and twice the row we made could not have reached their ears.

All of our fellows below belonging to the port watch came tumbling up the hatchways in a jiffy on hearing the 'assembly,' clutching up their rifles and sword-bayonets from the arm-racks on the lower deck; while we of the starboard, who were already up from having the middle watch, proceeded at a break-neck pace to fetch ours.

Then the gunner took his keys from their appointed place outside the door of the captain's cabin and went below to open the magazines in the flat appropriated to their combustible contents, in company with a working party to attend to the ammunition hoists; while the marine artillerymen and crews of the main-deck battery and upper-deck machine-guns hurried to their stations under charge of "Gunnery Jack," the lieutenant whose special function was to see to our little barkers.

A minute later, when those whose duties did not take them elsewhere were ranged along the upper deck, Captain Hankey, who had gone down to his cabin in the meantime and buckled on his sword to be in proper fighting rig, came back on the bridge, where he remained in conversation with Mr Gresham until the 'orderly' midshipman—I don't mean to say that the others were disorderly, but only just wish to specify those who were told off to carry messages from the various parts of the ship, when at 'quarters,' to the captain, they acting, so to speak, as his aides-de-camp on board—returned to say all was as it should be.

"Now then, Gresham," said 'old Hankey Pankey,' drawing himself up to his full height, and looking every inch what he was, an officer and a gentleman—ay, and a sailor too, as plucky as they make them—"I think we'd better begin, or those

beggars will get too far ahead, and a stern chase, you know, is a long chase. Bugler, sound 'man and arm boats'!"

The boy, a young marine, who did this part of our musical business, puffed out his cheeks, inflating his lungs the while, and blew a blast that seemed to make the air shake; the boatswain's mates, who always act on such occasions like the chorus at the opera, screeching with their whistles fore and aft up and down the hatchways, repeating with an exasperating repetition the same order little Joey the bugler had already given; while, all the officers who had charge of the respective boats stood up at the gangways to inspect the crews of these as they went down the side to take their places on the thwarts, so as to see they were all properly equipped.

"Mr Gresham," said Captain Hankey to the first lieutenant, "I should like you to go in the steam pinnace and work away to win'ard towards Ras Hafim—you know the place we marked on the chart last night above Binna?"

"Very good, sir," replied Mr Gresham, taking up a revolver and box of cartridges he had brought on deck with him, and going towards the after gangway, abreast of which the steam pinnace was lying, buzzing away like a little wasp alongside; the intimation on the part of our captain that he would 'like' a thing being done being quite equivalent to a command to do it! "You mean, sir, that queer-shaped headland some twenty miles down the coast?"

"Yes, we passed it when we came back from the wreck," replied 'old Hankey Pankey,' pointing with his hand away to windward. "You will then cut off the retreat of the dhows, while we head them off farther up the coast."

"Very good, sir," said Mr Gresham, accepting this as a final dismissal. "I will attend to your orders, sir. By George, those Arabs will have to be precious sharp if they manage to steal back past us to their haunts!"

So saying, Mr Gresham went down the side, without any further palaver; and, when he was seated in the sternsheets, the pinnace went off in a bee-line to the sou'-west in the teeth of the monsoon, which was beginning to blow now pretty briskly.

The first cutter was then piped away, Larrikins and I being the two first to jump aboard her when the bowman laid hold of her painter and drew her up alongside.

Lieutenant Dabchick came with us in command, as soon as she was fully manned and armed, an ammunition-chest being lowered down with a supply of 'pills and pepper' for the little nine-pounder boat-gun we carried in our bows; when, we sheered away from the ship's side and lay on our oars, and the second cutter hauled up alongside to receive her crew and equipment like ourselves.

This did not take long in doing—the whaler being also manned and the senior midshipman sent in charge of her, with the boatswain to check his rashness; and then, the three of us, first cutter, second cutter and whaler, were all taken in tow by the *Mermaid*, which went off full speed ahead after the Arab dhows that were now only some five miles off us, the cruiser shaping a slanting course so as to prevent them from making for the wide stretch of open water that lay to the north'ard, should they try to escape in that way.

Their retreat to the port whence they had sailed was cut off by the pinnace; and, as their only refuge now when we overhauled them would be the rock-bound coast lying between Binna and Ras Hafim, they were, as I heard Mr Dabchick say to the coxswain, 'between the devil and the deep sea!'

The reckless beggars, too, were so busy looking out in the direction of the stranded steamer for which they were making, that somehow or other they did not catch sight of us until they were nearly within easy range of our six-inch breechloaders; the leading dhow, which was what the Arabs call a 'batilla,' and carried two large lugs or lateen sails on wide yards, besides a sort of square jib forwards, rigged out on a bowsprit like a spritsail boom, caught sight of us as we luffed up to let fly at her.

For a second or two they seemed all of a heap, like a covey of frightened partridges; and then, getting their tacks aboard as smartly as if they were English seamen and not rascally Somali Arabs, they hauled their wind and made in for the shore, thinking, no doubt, 'Old Nick' was after them.

They were not far out in this surmise, if such should have crossed their minds, as they very quickly found out.

The *Mermaid* yawed off her course, swirling us round in her wake as our tow-rope slackened and then grew taut again, all in an instant; and, then, bang belched out one of our big hundred-pounder quick-firing guns that we carried on the upper deck

fore and aft, pitching a shell that burst right over the rearmost dhow.

This made them quicken their movements if possible; while 'old Hankey Pankey,' seeing we were a trifle short in our range, steamed on after them so that they might have the full benefit of all our battery—the water now churning up over the gunwale of the cutter as she dragged us on astern of her, the bow of the boat high in air, while we were all the more depressed aft from having the other boats behind us.

On flew the dhows, on raced the *Mermaid*, flopping her tail as represented by the boats in tow, for we did wag about pretty considerably, as one of our men who was half a Yankee said; until, presently, on the water showing signs of shoaling, the *Mermaid* brought up broadside on and began pitching shot and shell as fast as the men could work her batteries at the dhows, which were now well inshore and almost on the rocks—which latter seemed to jut out from this coast in the most shapeless, uncanny fashion, like the solitary tusk or two still possessed by some nearly toothless old hag.

'Bang, smash, boom!' went our guns, the fire bursting forth from the ship's side in the centre of puff-balls of smoke, accompanied by the hurtling sound of the shot through the air, and the dull intonation the shell gave out after the first report, when these missiles discharged their contents around their target. 'Bang, smash, boom!'

It must have been pretty lively for the Arabs: too warm after a bit to be pleasant!

So 'old Hankey Pankey' appeared to think; and, when our guns had fired about a couple of rounds each all round, the bugle sounded the 'cease fire,' and he came aft and hailed us.

"Mr Dabchick," he called out, "I'm going to cast you off, and you will pull straight for the shore and capture those dhows as best you can, while I will cover your advance with the guns of the ship. Recollect, you are in command of the expedition and that Mr Doyle in the cutter, and Mr Chisholm in the whaler, are under your orders; so, you can do as you think best when you get alongside them. I would divide my forces, Dabchick, if I were you; but, you must exercise your own judgment when the time comes!"

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the lieutenant, as heartily as if he had just been told he was made 'first luff' of the flagship—for,

though sleepy sometimes when on watch of a night, he was a plucky little chap, with a lot of go in him; and then, as our painter was sent adrift and the slack hauled in by the bowmen, he sang out to us, "Oars! Off we go, my lads!"

This was the signal for a ringing cheer from all hands in our boat, as well as from those in the second cutter and whaler, which had been likewise cast off from the tow-rope; while 'old Hankey Pankey' himself jumped up into the rigging of the *Mermaid* as we started away, and led a return cheer from the ship as the three of us raced in line abreast towards the dhows inshore.

The sun was now well up in the sky, and it was blazing hot over our heads, but I don't think a man of us minded this, as we pulled away, like Britons, and as lightheartedly as some of us used to do in the old days when we belonged to the *Saint Vincent*, and were struggling our best to be the first boat at our summer breaking-up sports so as to win the Admiralty medal!

But, there was something more than a medal at stake now, aye, or a money prize either; for we were battling, as we all well knew, mere lads though most of us were, for our Queen—God bless her!—and that country whose flag waves over every sea, and on whose dominions, stretching from east to west all round the globe, the sun never sets!

Nearer and nearer we got into the coast, all hands pulling with a will; Larrikins, who was stroke, giving the fellows a touch of his old style when he rowed in the captain's gig of the training-ship; the whaler, with the middy in command, running us hard, though, and the second cutter labouring up astern.

As we approached the dhows, however, Mr Dabchick ordered us to pull easy, singing out to the other boats to spread out to leeward and make for the batilla, which had remained behind like a watchdog guarding the smaller craft, while we attacked her in the bows.

The breeze was now dying away, the wind blowing off shore; and the Somalis, seeing this, triced up their lateen sails, turning round like rats driven up into a corner and facing us, at bay.

Captain Hankey, who had been pitching shot and shell into them from the moment of our casting off from the *Mermaid*, some of the missiles describing beautiful curves over our heads as we pulled in, now ceased firing, for fear of hitting us as well as the foe; and so, the Arabs were able to concentrate all their



energies towards resisting us, the batilla sending some round shot in our direction from an old brass carronade she had mounted on her high forecastle, one of which, skipping along the water as if it were playing ducks and drakes, shaved off three of our oar-blades on the starboard side.

This did not stop us, though.

"Shift over, bow and the next man," shouted out Mr Dabchick. "Now, all together, pull away, my lads, and let us go for them!"

The cheer that we gave on starting away from the *Mermaid* was nothing to what our chaps roared out now from their lusty throats; as, making the water boil with the blades of our oars, we rowed hand over fist right at the batilla's bows, the second cutter making for her stern while the whaler, by Mr Dabchick's directions, pulled athwart the hawse of a smaller dhow that had stayed her flight landwards and was coming back, apparently, to the assistance of her big consort.

'Crash!' came the stem of our boat against the side of the batilla at the same time that her old carronade, which had been loaded this time with bullets and scrap iron like a shell, and having its muzzle depressed, went off, right in our faces, with a 'Bang!'

One of the fellows forward, the bowman on the port side of the cutter, poor chap, tumbled backward overboard, uttering a wild shriek as he fell; but otherwise the discharge did not do us much damage, and in another second we seemed all scrambling up into the dhow and were at it hammer and tongs.

It was my first fight and I can't forget it.

Every single incident that occurred stands out as clearly before me now as if I were going over it all again!

We had, of course, all loaded up with ball-cartridge and fixed the sword-bayonets to our rifles before we got up to the Arabs; and, by the orders of our commander, we gave them a volley at close quarters as we boarded.

But, after this, I don't think any one thought of loading or firing again, save one or two of the fellows astern and the coxswain of the boat, being too busy guarding the slashes the Somalis made at us with their long scimitar-like swords that were curved like reaping-hooks, and the blows they dealt us with their unwieldy matchlocks, which they used in club fashion.

It was a terrible struggle trying to climb the high overhanging sides of the batilla in the face of such tooth and nail opposition, the beggars fighting, as Mr Gresham had said, like veritable wild cats!

We were beaten back into the cutter twice, after some half a dozen of us had been wounded, some desperately; and then the second cutter, which could not manage to board her astern, coming up to our help and sheering in alongside us, our gallant leader Mr Dabchick determined on one grand final rush.

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## **Chapter Twenty Four.**

### **We Nearly Lose the Cutter!**

"Larrikins," said I, whispering in his ear, as we stood up together just in the rear of Mr Dabchick, balancing myself on one of the thwarts forward, being about to make another spring for the side of the big dhow, while Larry shoved a cartridge hastily into the breech of his rifle, and was in the act of taking a pot shot at a chap who seemed to be the skipper of the batilla and had a nose on him like the beak of a Brazilian parrot, "little Dabby means business!" He did.

Hardly had I said this to my chum, making him miss his aim, I am sorry to say, at the Arab beggar, who made a cut at me the next minute and would have sliced off my starboard fin if I had not drawn back rather hurriedly, ere our lieutenant sprang on to the back of Jones, the other bowman, and then jumped right clean amongst the mass of Arabs in the bows of the dhow.

"Come on, my lads!" he cried, in the middle of his jump; "follow me!"

This was enough for us.

Without an instant's reflection I imitated Dabby, using Jones's back as a scaling-ladder, as did half a dozen other fellows; until the poor beggar was pretty nearly trodden flat into the bottom of the boat.

'Whiz!' went the matchlock balls of the Arabs past our ears; 'whir-r-ir' sliced away their scimitars right and left in the air, with the regularity of so many flails at work on a barn-floor; but we did not mind them a bit, for the 'phit—phit—phit!' of the

bullets from our Martini rifles pattered amongst the bronze-coloured rascals like hail, deadening the whiz of their longer-barrelled weapons, while ever and anon the Maxim of the second cutter grunted out a fusillade of grape, making a noise like that of an old man with a bad cough on a winter's night going up to bed in the cold.

"Ship my rowlocks!" as father would have said had he been there, but the Maxim made some of those blessed Arabs cough, I can tell you; ay, and put a goodish few to bed too!

"Lor'," cried Larrikins, who was fighting like a bulldog by my side, "I never did see, blame me Tom, sich a bloomin' scrimmage in me life as this yere!"

It was all that, it being a case of give and take all round, for the Somalis made a rare stand.

They went their best for Dabby, seeing that he was our leader; but the plucky little chap, with his sword in one hand and a revolver in the other, stood amongst them as brave as you please, cutting at this one, peppering at that, and guarding in some miraculous way a hundred blows aimed at him from every side.

Don't think, though, that we left our officer to battle against the Arabs single-handed.

Not we.

I do not say it in any boasting sense, will you please recollect, for I am sure that no one who knows me would accuse me of being a braggart; but, as I am telling of events that really happened, I must speak the truth, and so to do this I am obliged to say that I was one of the first to spring to Mr Dabchick's side after he boarded the dhow, Larrikins coming next with a mad leap that nearly scrunched my toes off, and then the coxswain of the cutter and the rest of the chaps.

Striking out with our cutlasses, we soon cleared a circle round the lieutenant; and then, forming up like a breastwork in front of him, we rushed at the remaining Somalis in the bows, hurling over into the sea, with the impetus of our charge, those whom we did not cut down outright, or settle with a thrust from our straight-edged blades.

The crew of our other boat had meanwhile climbed aboard amidships, where they soon despatched the rest of the Arabs

holding out there, a well-aimed shot from the rifle of Larrikins potting the green-turbaned chief of the gang.

With his fall, all opposition now ceased, and we took possession of our prize; some twenty odd Somalis only remaining in our hands as prisoners, the others having been all slain in open combat, or drowned when they tumbled over the side.

We had not escaped scatheless either, for we lost three men in our boat, besides Bartlett the bowman, and had five wounded, the coxswain seriously; while Larrikins had a bullet through the fleshy part of his forearm, and I received a knock on the knee from a friendly Arab which made me limp for more than a month afterwards.

The second cutter, however, came off the worst, Mr Doyle, our junior lieutenant, having been shot through the lungs with a jagged matchlock ball in the desperate hand-to-hand fighting that ensued on her first attack, which the Somalis repulsed, twelve more men of her complement, besides, being either killed or wounded.

Poor Mr Doyle died shortly after we effected the capture of the batilla; but, being a quiet, inoffensive sort of man, I don't think his loss affected any one very much, while Mr Chisholm the midddy, who was made an acting sub-lieutenant in his place—such is the fortune of war—was the reverse of sad when he came up to us presently in the whaler, towing the smaller dhow, which he had very pluckily captured to his own cheek.

The rest of the Somali craft had been run ashore on the rocks to escape our clutches, reminding me of my old chum Mick one day, when we were walking along the Gosport ramparts and it was raining, proceeding carefully to take off his clothes and go into the water, to 'kape himself dhry,' as he explained to me in his Irish way.

So now the Arabs had knocked their dhows to pieces to save them; but the men who manned them, as well as the poor slaves with which the majority of them had been crammed, we found, on pulling inshore to examine them later on, had all got safely beyond our reach, far away amid the khors of the desert coast of the barren and inhospitable Nogal country.

To make matters certain that they should not be able to get the dhows afloat again in the event of their returning, as well as to revenge ourselves at being prevented from towing these off ourselves, so that we might obtain the usual bounty given by

the Zanzibar prize court for their capture, we set fire to every single one of them, burning the lot to the water's edge.

The whaler assisted us at this job, the second cutter being sent back to the ship by Mr Dabchick to convey all our wounded comrades thither for medical treatment, as well as the body of Mr Doyle, and that of another poor fellow who had not gone overboard; we ourselves not yet returning to the *Mermaid*, not rejoining her until our task was done, late in the afternoon.

We buried the lieutenant and bluejacket who had fallen, at sunset; after which, hoisting in all our boats, the cruiser put on steam and made for Ras Hafim, picking up, when nearly abreast of the headland, just before dark, the steam pinnace—all the chaps aboard of which, from Mr Gresham downwards, getting quite angry when we told them of the little piece of business we had been engaged on up the coast, our shipmates being riled at having been left out in the cold and not sharing in our fun.

Fun they thought it; but, if they had gone through the job of scrubbing down the thwarts and bottom boards of the cutter after the fray, as Larrikins and I had to do, mopping up the blood and gore, which was more than an inch deep, the fighting would not have seemed so jolly as their imaginations pictured it.

Seeing nothing of our senior officer after picking up the pinnace, we proceeded down the coast in the direction of Zanzibar, running across him at last when near Mombassa.

This was lucky for us; for, as soon as Captain Hankey had communicated with the flagship, he received fresh instructions that he was to keep guard on the district lying between Pemba on the south and Witu on the north; and, as Mombassa was about midway between the two points, we were, so to speak, in the very centre of our cruising ground.

For the next few months, though, our work was not very lively, all of us belonging to the boats being now engaged on patrol duty and separated for weeks sometimes from our comrades on board the ship.

The first and second cutters, the launch, and the steam pinnace were each provisioned and sent away to scout along the coast independently of each other, watching for dhows and any suspicious craft we might see making from the mainland for the islands, having orders to capture or destroy such as we found carrying slaves; the *Mermaid*, our foster-mother, giving us a

look-up in turn at our respective stations, to see how we were getting on, and supply us with any stores we might need in the grub and water line.

It was a dreary task.

Sometimes for days we would not sight a sail; and, keeping out to sea, so as to avoid observation from the shore, there was nothing to be seen that could distract one's attention but the wide-stretching steel-blue surface of the limitless Indian Ocean, and the eternal coppery sky overhead, with never a cloud to shade us from the ever-blazing sun.

The south-west monsoon was in full swing, and the weather, consequently, was cooler than usual—that was one comfort; but, the irksomeness of our life was almost unbearable, and we all longed for something to happen, no matter what, to break the monotony of our perpetual patrol.

Of course, we did come across some dhows, one in particular, a large 'bagala,' a craft with a high square stern, and a prow like a goose-neck; while her poop resembled that of a Chinese junk, being only a trifle clumsier—if possible.

We overhauled this hooker between Zanzibar and Pemba; and, as she was making for the latter island, where cloves are grown and a large number of slaves employed in their cultivation, the trade being the most important on the coast, we naturally thought we were going to make a big haul and get no end of bounty for the capture of the dhow.

But, as luck would have it, when we boarded her, not a single nigger was aboard, nor was there any sign about her to show that she was fitted out for the contraband business, there being no second bamboo deck betwixt her hold and the upper one, which the slavers always have; and, though we rummaged her fore and aft, we could not tumble upon the special stock of rice and barricoes of water, which are always carried for the accommodation of the ebony passengers, if they have any.

No, all was in order; her 'reis,' or skipper, a swarthy Arab, with the most diabolical expression I ever saw on human face, showing us his clearance paper, which had the stamp of the British Consulate, and described that he was bound on a trading voyage to Muscat.

So we had to let him pass, the old rascal of a 'reis' grinning over her stern at us as the bagala made off, running before the wind;

the hook-nosed Arab looking as pleased as Punch, and yet having a sort of sly, malicious twinkle in his eye, like that 'Old Nick' probably puts on 'when he catches a churchwarden robbing a till,' as Larrikins said.

No wonder the old slave-dealer sniggered to himself; for we heard afterwards that he put in at Pangani the same night, after we were out of sight, beating down to the southward, and succeeded in running a cargo of the usual sort, the proceeds of the trip enabling him to retire from business and set up as a holy man for the rest of his life.

Beyond boarding this dhow, though we saw some others at a distance which we were unable to forereach on, the beggars being too handy on a wind, we did not have a single exciting incident for the three months or more that we were detached from our ship; and all of us, as I have said, were longing for something to wake us up.

This 'something' came at last.

Ay; and in a most unexpected fashion, too!

It was getting near the time for the *Mermaid* to come and relieve us, and we were making for our rendezvous at Bagamoyo, to the south of Zanzibar, for her to pick us up.

The south-west monsoon having slackened down a good deal within the last few days, though the month of August, when it usually blows with its greatest force, we were able to work well to windward; and we were rapidly closing on Bagamoyo, when the sea began to get up in a very strange manner, and the sky, which had been cloudless, as customary, since the morning, became clouded with masses of fleeting vapour that presently banked themselves on the horizon to the north.

"I say, Draper," said Mr Chisholm, who, since his promotion, had been appointed to the cutter, turning round to our coxswain, "what do you think of the weather?"

"Think, sir?" rejoined Draper, who had served on the East African station before joining the *Mermaid*, and 'knew the ropes,' as the saying goes. "I don't think about it at all, sir."

"Well, well," said Mr Chisholm, who was a jocular sort of young fellow and never hard on a man, besides which he knew Draper's crusty way, "tell us what you know, then."

"Very good, sir," replied our old shellback of a coxswain. "Then, I knows, sir, the monsoon's on the shift, and we're agoin' to have a blow from the nor'ard afore dark."

"What do you advise our doing, coxen?"

"Adwise, sir?" repeated Draper, as usual, after Mr Chisholm, his habit always when asked a question. "If I was you, sir, I'd up stick and run for it, sir, to the nearest port."

"The nearest port on our lee is Zanzibar," said Mr Chisholm. "I suppose you mean to loo'ard, Draper?"

"Aye, aye, sir, I means to loo'ard."

"Then you advise our putting up the helm and running for Zanzibar?"

"Aye."

The cutter was rigged with a dipping lug and a spritsail; so, no sooner had crusty old Draper given his laconic answer to Mr Chisholm, than the latter sang out to Larrikins, who was in the bows.

"Look out there forrud!" he cried. "Stand by to dip!"

This is considered one of the smartest things in boat-sailing, the men having to be specially stationed for the purpose; but, as we had been living in the cutter now for three months, and had experience of her under any and every change of wind and sail, the operation did not occasion much difficulty to us.

Larrikins, who was bowman, pressed out the fore part of the lug as soon as the yard was half lowered, while two other hands gathered the sheet of the sail forwards, and passed it round the mast as soon as Draper had put the helm up; when I and another chap who was aft with me, unhooked the sheet to port and then rehooked it to the starboard side, which was to windward now on the cutter's head coming round, as she went off on the other tack.

Gathering way in a minute or two as we eased off the sheet of the lug, the cutter went ahead at a great pace, making much better weather of it running before the wind, as was the case now, than she had lately, before we came about, when beating up to Bagamoyo; skimming over the broken surface of the sea, her bows and the deadwood of her keel forwards being clean



out of the water sometimes as she jumped from wave to wave, and sending the spray she threw up as she came down bash on the top of some billow, right inboard, wetting us to the skin, and leaving a wake behind her like a millrace.

We were steering almost due north now; and, looking ahead under the leech of the lugsail, I could see that the clouds we had observed before banked up on the horizon had crept up towards the zenith, spreading out laterally on either side, until half of the heavens was obscured.

Then, all of a sudden, the wind dropped, as if done with a turn of the hand.

"Look out there for your sheet!" cried old Draper, in a warning tone, assuming the direction of affairs and taking command of the boat unconsciously in the emergency, over the head of his officer, Mr Chisholm. "Let go your sheet, I say!"

Bouncer the seaman, who sat on the after thwart and had charge of this, bungled about the job, having taken a turn with the end of the rope round the cleat, instead of holding it in his fist as he should have done; and the coxswain's harsh repetition of the order in such an imperative tone seemed to flurry him, making him all the slower.

"Hang it all, man!" shouted Mr Chisholm, taking up the cry, "let go the sheet at once!"

Seeing what a fog Bouncer was in, besides which the sail was just then beginning to bulge back as the wind headed us, the boat rocking for an instant and then canting over as if she was going to capsize, I drew my knife and rushed to where he sat in the bottom of the boat, struggling with the sheet!

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## **Chapter Twenty Five.**

### **The Arab Stronghold.**

At that moment the wind lulled for an instant, and I was just able to make a slash with the sharp edge of my knife across the rope, severing it instantaneously, and thus saving poor bungling Bouncer all further trouble; when, a terrific gust came, this time right astern, carrying sail and mast and all, the latter snapping off like a carrot close to the thwart where it was stepped, over

the heads of all in the boat forwards, high in air—just as if the lot were the remnants of a big kite that had parted its supporting string, the sail ultimately disappearing in the distance, swallowed up by the angry waves.

These latter were now boiling up round the cutter on every side, our little pigmy of a craft seeming lost in the seething caldron of broken water; but, she was buoyant as a cork, and, although half rilled, breasted the billows in fine style and running before wind and sea at a tearing rate with not a rag of sail on her now, nor an oar, save one Mr Chisholm and I rigged out over the stern by Draper's direction, this being better to steer her by than the rudder, which we then unshipped.

It was a good job for us that our old coxswain had got wounded, and that Draper had taken his place just then temporarily while Hoskins was on the sick-list; for, though Draper was the oldest petty officer on board the ship—his promotion to a higher grade having been delayed, I believe, through his natural crustiness of temper, which he really could not help—there was no doubt that he knew the East Coast of Africa well, and the management of a boat the better of the two, especially in a stormy sea.

Ay, and it was stormy now!

Far as the eye could reach, the mad waves dashed and clashed against each other as they raced along, borne onward before the blast; throwing up their white crests, all lashed into foam, in showers of spray and spindrift that fell back over us in the boat, wetting us to the skin and blinding those that had to face it.

The horizon, too—what we could see of it, that is, through the spray—was covered with a mass of inky clouds, almost blue-black in hue, that covered by degrees the whole of the heavens, with the exception of a round spot right overhead that looked like a gigantic eye.

Mr Chisholm, who, young though he was, had the sight of a hawk, spotted this at once.

"Hullo, Draper!" he cried, pointing aloft. "What's that up there—anything more brewing up for us, d'ye think?"

The coxswain, who had all his work cut out to keep the boat from being swamped by the heavy following seas that came rolling up astern of us, threatening every minute to engulf the

cutter and carry her down bodily below, gave an uneasy squint in the direction whither the young officer pointed his finger.

"Lord-sakes, sir," he exclaimed, shaking his head in a very grave way, "that be a h'ox-eye!"

"Ox-eye!" Mr Chisholm repeated after him in a quizzing tone, with a grin on his face. "I've heard of ox-tongues before—those tinned ones ain't bad eating sometimes for lunch on a pinch; but an ox-eye—what is that, Draper?"

"Nothin' to larf about," grunted out our crusty coxswain, bracing his body against the loom of the oar with which he was steering and slewing the boat's head aside to avoid a cross sea that nearly broke at that very moment over our bows. "If ye'd be'n as long on this coast as me, sir, ye'd know when ye seed one o' them things up there—it means, 'Look out!' Ay, by the Lord too, we must look out now! Stand by there—all hands lie down in the bottom of the boat; it's yer only chance, if ye values yer lives!"

"Down, men!" Mr Chisholm cried, endorsing Draper's words of warning with his command. "Do as the coxswain tells you—down for your lives!"

Our chaps who were seated on the thwarts forwards and amidships at once scrambled down on the bottom boards, while we in the sternsheets, including Mr Chisholm himself, squatted on the grating, only old Draper sitting up still at his post aft with both hands holding the loom of the steering oar in a firm grip.

"Bend yer heads," muttered this worthy the next moment; "it's a-comin' now!"

As the words passed his lips and we all bowed down below the level of the gunwale, the roar of the sea seemed hushed in the dead stillness that ensued; and then, with a wild shriek that sounded like the moaning of some lost soul from the bottomless pit, the wind, which had been gathering up all its strength in the interim, burst upon us, burying the cutter's bows as it struck her right under water.

Bouncer, frightened out of his life, made a movement to rise as he lay alongside me on the stern grating; but old Draper gave him a kick in the ribs with the toe of his heavy boot.

"Lie still, you beggar!" he cried, bringing, with a tremendous pull of his arms, the oar-rudder hard over. "The boat's rightin' all right. We've seed the wust on it if yer'll only bide still!"

Fortunately, we had a weather cloth over the bow, which prevented the sea from pouring in and swamping us when the cutter dipped under; while, as all of us remained quiet and our dead weight was more towards the stern than forwards, the boat's natural buoyancy prevailed and she rose up like a cork.

The worst might have been over, as Draper had said; still, we were not 'out of the wood' yet, gust after gust assailing us, and the waves racing up madly astern, when, dividing, they would tower up on either side of our frail craft, threatening destruction for the moment ere they rolled onward again—we, all the while, fleeing before the fury of the storm we knew not whither, powerless alike to shape a course or guide our boat.

All that our skilful coxswain could do was to prevent the cutter from shipping a sea, no matter how the wind took us, or whether we ran with the billows or athwart them, as sometimes happened from the sudden shift of the gale, at whose beck and call we were; for, one moment going north or west into the open sea, the next recklessly careering eastwards, right in upon the rocks of the mainland, or dashing south amongst the mazy little islands and islets round and about Zanzibar, where our plight would be as perilous.

We had been boxing the compass like this for some four or five hours, without the weather showing any signs of a mend, it being now late in the afternoon; and our head turned towards Bagamoyo again for about the fifth time that day since we began our circling experiences, when, just as it was beginning to grow darker, though there had not been much light about since noon, a ship hove in sight.

She was dead ahead of us, riding out the gale under steam.

The smoke of her funnels was trailing away to leeward and so mixing up with the clouds that were banked on the horizon that old Draper, who was looking out as well as steering, for he would not allow any of us to sit on the thwarts, said he could not tell 't'other from which.'

Presently, however, as we surged onwards, carried down upon her at the rate of twelve knots or more, Draper could distinguish the smoke from the clouds; ay, and the ship herself.

"By the Lord!" he cried, looking at Mr Chisholm, his face all aglow and his voice heartier than I ever heard him speak before, "it's the *Mermaid*, sir."

"The *Mermaid*, coxswain!" ejaculated Mr Chisholm, at once jumping to his feet and taking a sight himself, shading his eyes with his hand. "Yes, it is the *Mermaid*, hurrah!"

"Steady there, sir," said Draper, warningly putting his hand on the young officer's arm; "we ain't aboard her yet, sir; and if yer don't keep cool, sir, beggin' yer pardon, sir, it's precious little we'll see of her this night, or ever ag'en, fur that matter!"

"But, how shall we get alongside?"

"Keep cool, sir. I'll tell 'ee when the time comes," rejoined the coxswain, in a soothing tone that took off the impertinence of his thus speaking to his officer. "You leave it to me, sir, and I'll find a way, if man can do it, to get alongside our old hooker; 'sides them aboard 'll be on the lookout, too, and between the pair on us we ought fur to manage it comf'ably!"

While 'old crusty' was laying down the law in this fashion, though continuing to mind his steering as smartly as he had done all along, the cutter was nearing the cruiser every instant, the wind taking her along in a series of mad leaps and bounds through the water and over the water, jumping from the top of one wave to that of another, and sometimes almost in mid-air, until we seemed about to hop on board the *Mermaid*, all standing like some of those flying-fish I have seen in the tropics, or else smash ourselves all to pieces against her iron hull.

But, in the nick of time, when only some twenty or thirty yards off her sharp ram bow, which would have cut into the cutter as easily as a knife goes into butter in summer-time, Draper gave a tug to his steering oar; and, Captain Hankey 'making a lee' for us by porting his helm, we glided into comparatively calm water under the cruiser's starboard counter.

A dozen ropes were thrown to us from men already stationed in the rigging for the purpose, a dozen hands and more held out to help us up the side; and almost before any of us well knew where we were, there we stood, safe and sound on the deck of our old ship again, the cutter being then hoisted up to the davits.

Draper, who had saved her and us, was the last man to leave her, when the falls were secured and the gripes put round the boat again.

After this exciting episode, nothing very notable occurred during our stay on this part of the coast for the next twelve months, beyond my being made 'able seaman.'

I passed for this grade very satisfactorily, I am glad to say; but, it would not be fair for me to omit mentioning that it was mainly through my old friend Larrikins that I was able to get off with flying colours. My old chum coached me up in the knotting and splicing of wire rope, of which art he was a proficient, his father being a working smith, and Larrikins himself having been intended originally for that trade, before the superior attractions of the sea weaned him from the paternal handicraft.

In the following year, however, matters became a trifle livelier on the East coast.

The Somali, from the constant blockade we kept up along their territory with our boats and cruisers, from Cape Guardafui down to the Equator, thus putting a stop to their slave-dealings, capturing as we did all their dhows and blocking all outlets from the coast, determined on retaliatory measures; so, mustering all their forces and calling up the assistance of the slave-dealers of the interior, they began to attack various points of the British protectorate.

Possibly, had the Arabs only us to deal with, things might not have got to this pass; but, very unluckily for this country, the Germans, who have long been jealous of our colonial enterprise and commercial success in Africa as elsewhere, took it into their heads, not long since, to extend their trade on the eastern seaboard.

The ideas of Meinherr Von Sourkrout and his warlike Kaiser in respect of the colonisation of this part of the Dark Continent, like those of our French cousins on the West Coast, differ much from the more peaceful plan pursued by England for several generations past—a plan that has worked wonderfully well in the building up of our Empire, and the spread of our manufactures over every land and sea!

Meinherr Sourkrout's method for extending trade, that is, according to the experience of us bluejackets of the British Navy who have served on the East African station, has been to shoot down the natives wherever the flag of his Fatherland has ever

been stuck up; and, when the men of the negro tribes, objecting to such friendly advances, have bolted into the bush, Meinherr, imitating the example of his great countryman Marshal Haynau, took to flogging their wives and womenfolk in order to coax the black gentlemen back.

The darkeys, somehow or other, didn't tackle to this treatment; and, the Germans having thus roused them up to the south of our protectorate, where, unfortunately for us, Meinherr Von Sourkrout and his domineering compatriots have a territory far too close to our own, the natives, being of the opinion that we were in sympathy with their oppressors, joined hands with the Somalis in their advance on our trading posts along the coast—they did not touch those belonging to the Germans, for the very good reason that these have none!

I heard Mr Gresham explaining all this one day to Dabby when they were both sitting in the captain's gig, to which I had been shifted since my promotion to able seaman; for I was pulling stroke at the time, the boat taking them ashore to a grand dinner-party given by the British Consul to the Sultan or some other 'big pot' at Zanzibar, off which port the *Mermaid* was then lying.

I wondered what led to this queer talk, as none of us on board had heard anything on the lower deck about any row being imminent; for, of course, sick of our stagnant life for the last few months, as all of us were, the inkling of any fight being in the air would have been as welcome to us as the 'flowers of May.'

Still I kept my ears open all the same; and when, the next morning, I met the captain's steward returning from the galley with a cup of early cocoa for 'old Hankey Pankey,' and he told me that he thought we were going to be busy soon, the 'old man' having directed him to take out his sword and pistols, and give them to his marine servant to be cleaned up, I began, as 'Gyp' did that time on board the *Saint Vincent*, 'to smell a rat.'

A little later on, my impressions became confirmed; for, just as we were piped down to breakfast after 'wash and scrub decks,' and I was telling Larrikins, who sat alongside me at the mess-table, what I had heard, the engine-room gong sounded, and the word was passed to get up steam as quickly as possible.

'Old Hankey Pankey' did not waste time when he had once got his orders; and some couple of hours after we had weighed anchor and were rapidly leaving Zanzibar, with its rows of

square stone houses, built with flat roofs in the eastern style, that front the beautiful curving bay, whose white sandy beach is washed by water so clear that you can see the bottom at six fathoms, and which is backed, beyond the warehouses and mansions of the merchants, by the bright greenery of palm trees and dates and other rich tropical growths, the beautiful foliage of which contrasts vividly with the intense whiteness of the buildings and adjacent shore, offering quite a relief to the eye from the glaring sun and coppery sky overhead.

"Say, Tom," said Larrikins to me presently, as the two of us, with a lot of the other hands, were polishing up the brasswork of the machine-guns on the upper deck, "d'yer know where we're bound in such a hurry?"

"No, Larry," I replied. "Somewhere up the coast, though, I 'spect from what I told you down below."

Larrikins chuckled to himself.

"Ye'r a fine chap, Tom, to give a fellow h'infumation," he said with a snigger. "I could 'a told you as much meself. Why, carn't I see with 'arf a h'eye we're steerin' to the north'ard up the coast, with the munsoon a-blowin' right in our teeth and the sun on our starb'rd 'and!"

I laughed, too, at the sharp wag's rejoinder.

"Well, Larry," I said at last, after polishing up the ratchet of the Nordenfeldt I was working at to my personal satisfaction, hoping to have the aiming of it bye-and-bye, "I can't tell you any more than that we are bound up the coast, and are likely to have a brush with the Arabs along there somewhere; but where that somewhere is, my joker, I'm hanged if I know!"

"I can tell you, mate," put in a man who was rubbing up the gun at the end of the bridge hard by where we were standing. "We're off for Mombassa again. I heard 'old Square toes,' the navigator, tell Mr Chisholm just now. He said we were agoin' to meet the *Merlin* there, and purseed further up the coast together."

"Oh!" said Larry, "that means business, Tom."

"Ay," said I, "it does, my hearty, and to tell the truth, Larry, I'm jolly glad of it."



So were all hands on board, when the news spread through the ship; and, on our reaching Mombassa late in the afternoon of the same day, steaming fifteen knots all the way, pretty nearly our full speed when the stokehold was not 'closed up,' we found the *Merlin* there before us, as the man on deck had told Larry and me in the morning.

This made assurance a certainty, every man-jack of the crew being cock-a-hoop with excitement, when, after a lot of signalling between the two cruisers, and the *Merlin's* gig bringing her captain alongside, he being junior to 'old Hankey Pankey,' the two of us sailed off in company just before sunset.

Our destination was Malindi, at the mouth of the Sabaki river, where it was reported the Somalis had made an inroad into the British protectorate, and burnt one of the out stations of the East African Company, slaughtering all the whites and natives employed by the traders.

This place was only some sixty miles to the northward of Mombassa; and all the arrangements for our landing having been completed, and 'old Hankey Pankey' settled his plan of operations with Captain Oliver of the *Merlin*, we did not hurry on the passage to Malindi, timing ourselves to arrive about daybreak, casting anchor in front of the town, as near in as we could get without shoaling our water, at Six Bells in the morning watch to the minute.

During our run up the coast from Mombassa, the first lieutenant and Mr Dabchick saw to our boats being got ready, and the bluejackets and marines, who were detailed for service with the expedition, mustered on deck in all their 'war paint,' and told off to the respective craft in which they were to go ashore; and by Eight Bells, after a hurried breakfast, which none of us much cared to eat, we were all so full of enthusiasm at the prospect of action, we shoved off from the *Mermaid*—all in dead silence, though, so that no inkling of our coming might reach the ears of the Arabs before we were upon them.

The boats of the *Merlin* left their ship at the same time as we did ours; the two lots making for the land in two columns abreast, 'old Hankey Pankey' leading our line in the launch, with the first and second cutters and the whaler trailing on behind, while Captain Oliver led those of the *Merlin*.

On reaching the shore, the sea being fortunately very quiet, though the north-east monsoon was now blowing, we waded up the sandy beach without any difficulty; and, leaving our flotilla

under charge of the boat-keepers, a couple of hands in each craft to look after them so as to prevent their grounding in the event of the wind getting up, when the surf might be dangerous, we united our forces and marched in a body inland.

Avoiding the town of Malindi, our object being to surprise a stockade, where the Somalis were reported to have established themselves, some five miles off in the bush, in the rear of the outposts of the settlers, we shaped a course south by west under the guidance of one of the natives, who had been sent to us by one of the principal merchants of the place on hearing of our landing, so as to make our way easy for us, steering by compass in the jungle ashore being very different to what it is on the open sea.

The rascal, who was evidently a Somali spy sent by his astute comrades to watch our movements, made our way very easy indeed; for he took us directly in front of the stockade we had intended surprising, instead of showing us a by-path leading to the rear of the fortification, from which we could have outflanked the defence.

'Old Hankey Pankey,' who led our fighting force of bluejackets and marines, which mustered in officers and men altogether some two hundred strong, was flabbergasted as he gaily marched in front of the column on our being received by a hail of bullets and buckshot, which decimated our ranks as we suddenly debouched from a rough, tangled undergrowth of scrub and dwarf plantain trees.

Amidst these we could hardly see an inch before us; and then, we found ourselves in front of a high palisade, made of the trunks of heavy trees lashed together with lianas and rattan creepers that were as strong as wire rope. This was loopholed for musketry, and from thence a murderous fire of innumerable weapons was directed at our devoted heads.

Plucky as a lion, however, the captain rallied us; and, dividing the column into three portions, taking command of the middle division himself, while Captain Oliver of the *Merlin*, and Lieutenant Dabchick of our ship, headed the two others, we advanced with a cheer to storm the stockade, 'old Hankey Pankey' aiming for its front face, and the other sections of our force for the flanks of the fortification.

Talk of fighting, it was a case of 'pull baker, pull devil!' then!

We numbered two hundred, as I have said, but the Somalis must have mustered two thousand at least, if they had a man there.

Twice we advanced to the attack, twice we were forced to fall back before the withering flight of bullets that met us face to face from every hole and corner of that infernal stockade; though Captain Hankey bravely walked right up to the timber work till he almost touched it, a revolver in either hand, which he fired alternately at the beggars!

But, the captain got a big matchlock ball through both his legs, the missile having been discharged at him as he turned sideways, with a "Follow me, lads!" to cheer us on.

He was not licked yet, though; for, as Larrikins stooped over him to lift him up, 'old Hankey Pankey' got his arm round his neck and climbed up on to him pick-a-back, Larry highly delighted at the job, he and the captain then advancing again to the assault.

In the meantime, Mr Dabchick had brought up one of our little nine-pounder boat-guns which had stuck in the rear and blew in part of the palisading on the left of the stockade, when he and a lot of us made a desperate charge to storm the entrenchment.

Poor little Dabby, though, was shot dead while entering the breach the shell of our nine-pounder had made in the outer palisade that protected the Arab defences; and then, finding a second fence composed of similar baulks of timber in front of us, as strong as that we had surmounted, and that the fire of the Somalis increased the nearer we got to them, our chaps, staggered by the fall of poor Dabby, I must confess it, all at once began to cut and run!

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## **Chapter Twenty Six.**

### **Baboon Valley.**

"Stand by!" roared 'old Hankey Pankey' from his perch on the top of Larry's shoulders, noticing our hasty retreat from the left of the stockade, our fellows indeed rushing back in their scurrying flight into the midst of the centre column and mixing it up into irretrievable confusion. "Steady there! Face round, my men, stand firm!"

Just at that moment, though, when starting forwards again, with the captain still pick-a-back on his shoulders, Larrikins stumbled over a dead Arab that lay in front of him, and down came he with 'old Hankey Pankey' all in a heap together, with a couple of Somalis, at whom they were going full butt.

This second catastrophe broke up our ranks, some of the chaps—only a few, though, I am proud to say—bolting into the bush; but Mr Chisholm, who was leading the rear division, waved his sword in the air, and cried out for volunteers to rescue our captain.

At once, the whole lot of us that were left followed him up to the front, where Larrikins and 'old Hankey Pankey'—the latter of whom of course could not rise of his own accord, by reason of the injury to his legs—were fighting as only Englishmen can fight amidst a perfect horde of Arabs, who had poured out from the stockade on seeing us retreat.

"Hurrah, boys!" cried Larry, as we came up at the double, firing away with our rifles right and left, and digging our sword-bayonets, till they were dyed red with blood, into the body of every Somali who barred our onward progress to the help of our comrade and the captain. "Give it to the bloomin' beggars hot!"

We did not need the advice, however, as the Arabs themselves could have borne testimony to, for with a wild rush, that carried everything and everybody before it, we drove our foe back into their stronghold, and recovered 'old Hankey Pankey,' who was at once hoisted triumphantly up by a couple of marines. These gallant fellows, I should add, to give all honour to the corps, stood stauncher even than we bluejackets did that day; for, not a man turned his back on the foe until the captain gave the word.

This 'old Hankey Pankey' was forced to do, much against the grain, a moment or two later on, Captain Oliver having been driven off from the right attack, thus leaving both our flanks now exposed as well as our front to the fire of the Somalis, who once more rushed out from the stockade upon us.

"We must retire, my lads," cried the captain in a hoarse voice, the words coming out with almost a sob. "But no hurry! Fall back by sections, each wheeling and firing in turn. The company will now retire! Quick march! Halt! Front!—fire!"

He suited the action to the word himself as he said this, discharging both his revolvers point-blank at two of the Arabs,

who were leading on the gang in hot pursuit of us, tumbling them over like ninepins.

We had retreated in this fashion for about a mile or so, changing front continually and facing the Somalis, who pressed us hard every inch of the way; until, coming to an open space on the main road that had been cut in a sort of zigzag through the bush from Malindi up to Uganda, the captain determined to make a stand here and teach our pursuers a lesson, the more particularly as we now had with us all our little nine-pounder boat-guns.

These, with the exception of one, that only got up at the last moment when too late, we had been unable to drag along with us for the attack on the stockade, the path we had traversed through the bush in the first instance under the leadership of our treacherous guide having almost been impassable for ourselves, let alone guns.

Accordingly, with a rapid order to Mr Shrapnell, or 'Gunnery Jack,' who had accompanied the column from the ship, but had remained behind with his little battery of field-pieces on their becoming bogged in the bush, trying all he could to extricate them so as to get up with the column, he being anxious, of course, to take his part in the fighting, we formed square in the open.

The thirty odd marines we had with us were drawn up two deep in front, they being the oldest and most seasoned men of our force; while we bluejackets were quickly echeloned along the sides and rear of the square, at each corner of which was stationed one of the nine-pounders.

Our Maxim gun, which had become jammed at its first discharge when using it against the stockade but had now been made serviceable again, was placed right in the centre of our front line, so as to fire over the heads of the rank kneeling.

"Now, men," shouted out Captain Hankey, who had dismounted from the shoulders of the 'jollies' who had been carrying him in the place of Larrikins since the latter's tumble, and was now seated on the stump of an old tree in the middle of the clearing, surrounded by us all and commanding a view of every part of the square, "aim low, and don't waste a shot; but, wait till I give the word!"

The Arabs, who had checked their advance on seeing us halt, hesitating as if waiting to learn what we were up to, now began

to press forward again, their ugly bronze faces, of a Jewish cut, peering at us out of the bush on either side; while a large number came out into the open with a rush, making for the front of the square and firing their queer long muskets, as well as hurling their jereeds, or short spears, right into our faces as they charged.

Every one of us, I can tell you, gripped his Martini rifle as if he would dig his nails into its steel barrel, sighting it for point-blank range and aiming low, as the captain had told us, to catch the beggars full in the bread-basket as they came up, yelling and waving their weapons about, thinking, no doubt, to frighten us.

But, though we might have faltered after our third repulse at the stockade, we were not frightened now; nor did a man of us wish to fall back, even if he had the chance.

We were only waiting for 'old Hankey Pankey' to give the word.

He did not delay this long.

"Steady, my lads!" he cried, in a warning voice, after a quick glance round the square to see that we had made all proper preparations to give our friends the Somalis a hospitable reception. "Are you ready, Mr Shrapnell?"

"Aye, aye, sir," replied 'Gunnery Jack' instanter, "all ready!"

"Then, we'll blaze away and let the beggars have it all together," yelled out 'old Hankey Pankey,' raising himself up in some wonderful sort of way on the top of the tree stump, for he could not stand on his legs; and, taking off his cap and waving it round his head thrice, he gave out the words, "One—two—three, Fire!"

Like a thunderclap, sharp, sudden, and rolling through the air with a concussion that shook the very ground under our feet, a murderous volley belched forth from our square, mowing down the Arabs as with the swath of a mower's scythe, the mass of on-rushing, howling, swarthy Somalis sinking down to the ground, overborne by the avalanche of shot and shell we hurled at them; for, the rifles of us men, the guns of Mr Shrapnell's battery, the revolvers of the officers, and the Maxim, all spoke at once and together.

Aye, so they did; and, though varied in tone, from the musical 'Ping!' of our Martinis to the crackling grunt of the quick-firing weapon, whose irritable cough could be heard above the deep

boom of the nine-pounders which echoed through the woods, all spoke the same word—Death!

We had no need to give them a second volley, the fearful effects of our first having so intimidated the few survivors we could see in the distance, that these incontinently fled back into the bush, leaving us now to pursue our retreat to the coast without any further molestation on their part.

But, albeit conquerors in this our last stand, the victory came too late to cheer us; and it was with greatly saddened hearts and drooping faces, thus offering a strongly marked contrast to the bright enthusiasm with which we all had started up country in the morning, we now slowly retraced our way to the shore, to the south of Malindi.

Out of the two hundred bluejackets and marines who had landed from the *Mermaid* and *Merlin* at break of day, but half that number returned on board their respective ships at nightfall, when the sun sank over the hills to the westward like a ball of fire, crimsoning the heavens to the hue of the blood that had been spilt!

On reaching the *Mermaid* the surgeon had Captain Hankey carried down to his cabin at once, as he was now becoming faint with exhaustion; though, I believe, the mortification he felt at the Arabs having licked us gave him more pain than the damage done to his legs by the ball of the matchlock, which had taken him athwartship through the fleshy part of his understandings—breaking no bones, but crippling him all the same.

The surgeon, however, could not keep him quiet long below; for no sooner had his wounds been dressed than he insisted on being brought up on deck again, when he had the hands all mustered aft and spoke a few sympathising words to us anent the events of the day. He expressed his sorrow at the loss of so many good men and true, and added that, though defeated for the time, we would shortly have 'a go at the Arabs' again, and nail the Union Jack of old England yet on top of the Somali stronghold.

"Three cheers now, my lads!" he called out at the end of his harangue, which was interspersed with a lot of 'ahem'-ing and 'haw'-ing, 'old Hankey Pankey' not being much of a speaker—"three cheers for the old flag that has never been licked yet in the long-run!"

If you could have only heard the shout that went up from the lusty throats of the chaps standing round me and Larrikins, you would not have thought we had just been beaten off by those black devils nor had to mourn so many jolly shipmates whom we would never see again in this life!

But, sailors can't afford to waste any time in 'crying over spilt milk'; it would be a poor lookout for them, aye, and for our country too, if they did!

'Old Hankey Pankey' was of a like opinion.

So no sooner had the echo of our ringing cheer died away amidst the hills beyond Malindi, now purpling with the shades of evening, ere, turning round as well as he could with his bandaged limbs, still sitting in the easy-chair in which he had been brought up from below, he hailed the signalman and told him to make the *Merlin's* number, calling Mr Gresham at the same time to his side, the two of them confabulating together.

Presently, in response to another signal from us, Captain Oliver came on board, when he joined in the talk going on between 'old Hankey Pankey' and Mr Gresham for a bit and then returned to his own ship; the *Merlin* shortly afterwards slipping her moorings and making off at full speed to the southwards.

"I tell 'ee wot, Tom," said Larrikins to me on our going down to the lower deck just then, the 'disperse' having sounded, and it being our watch below, "she's gone h'off fur to tell the h'admiral o' the bloomin' mess we've made on it!"

This we found was the case next morning when the captain's steward came forwards as usual; this worthy being better than a newspaper to all of us, for he used to tell us of things before they occurred, and truly enough too, instead of waiting for events to happen and then garbling them, as some prints I have seen do!

Two or three days later the *Merlin*, which reported having had a long chase after the senior officer, going almost as far as Zanzibar and back to Mombassa before she picked him up, returned to Malindi, in company with the *Bullfinch*, another small cruiser attached to the East African squadron.

Captain Oliver also brought orders from our chief, that parties of bluejackets were to be landed to protect Malindi from any hostile attack of the Arabs, while he with the admiral and all the force on the station were busy preparing an expedition on a



grand scale, to drive the Somalis altogether out of the British protectorate, and so prevent any further attempt on their part to invade the country for some time to come.

These instructions were acted on immediately by 'old Hankey Pankey' to the letter, parties of seamen and marines from each ship in turn landing and patrolling the outskirts of the settlement, in front of which our little fleet of three vessels was anchored; and so we 'marked time,' so to speak, for the next few months, waiting for the ships belonging to the West African squadron to come up with the admiral himself, as not until then would we be able to resume active operations against the foe, whose defeat of us before their stockade at Wooromoloo we were burning to avenge.

"Lor', Tom," said Larrikins to me, expressing the current feeling of all on board the *Mermaid*, "I'd die happy, s'help me, if I could only pot that there bloomin' Arab thief Abdalah, him we see'd shoot poor little Dabby. They told us, Tom, you reck'lect t'other day over in the nigger town there when we was on sentry go, him were the chief of the gang, and were boastin' o' killin' our h'officers and makin' all on us cut and run. Lor', I'd give a year's pay to settle that there beggar's hash!"

At last one morning, when we were pretty well tired of this forced inaction, a despatch boat came up from Mombassa, bringing orders from the admiral, who had arrived there in his flagship, accompanied by several gunboats and other vessels, nearly all the crews of which had been landed.

The admiral informed our captain that he was about to proceed inland through the province of Teita with this formidable column; and that he, 'old Hankey Pankey,' was to assemble as strong a force as he could muster from the ships under his command and with a second column thus formed he was to start from Malindi and work in a south-westerly direction, when the two bodies would meet, completely hemming in the Arabs.

'Old Hankey Pankey' got us all ashore the same afternoon the admiral's orders came; and, early the next morning, nearly four hundred strong now, just double our former strength, we marched off up country towards the scene of our defeat at the hands of the Somali chieftain Abdalah, on the occasion of our previous trip inland.

When we got near his stockade, though, which, it need hardly be stated, we approached with considerable caution this time, the old bird had flown, having crossed the Sabaki River before

our approach and gone to join the rest of the Somalis at Teita, whom the admiral was now busy encompassing.

Our way, therefore, so far, was clear; and, breasting the hills manfully, we proceeded along the route marked out for us, our hopes high and our spirits buoyant at the chance of now turning the tables on the old miscreant who had previously beguiled us.

The country a little way from the coast began to get beautifully wooded: while a series of undulating plateaus were planted by the natives with plantains and sugar-canes, besides various vegetables whose names none of us knew.

Farther up the mountains some of the trees were tall and spreading, unlike anything, I thought, that ever grew in Africa; for I recognised a mountain-ash and a sort of oak, while the juniper-tree perfumed the air with its aromatic smell.

I have good cause to remember these same junipers! On our way up the heights, Larrikins and I, who were scouting in advance, on either side of the front of the column, met a native, who told us in the bastard jargon of the coast called the Swahili language that some big animals, which he said were bigger than us and covered with long hair, were in a valley on our right; and that, if we valued our lives, so at least Larrikins told me, he having picked up some of the lingo from a negro woman at Malindi, we had better make a *détour* so as to avoid this place.

"Nonsense," said I. "The rascal, perhaps, is another spy like that chap who led us into the stockade trap! I ain't going out of the straight road the cap'en laid down for us to steer. He said the column was to go west sou'-west by compass, and west sou'-west, Larry, I'm going!"

So saying, off I bore in the direction I had indicated, keeping to the right of the main column, which was following the bank of the Sabaki River.

Trudging along steadily, Larry just keeping in sight of me, so as to hold touch with the column, I came, a little way farther on, upon a most beautiful grove of camphor and juniper-trees, that seemed cut out of a gorge in the Kilima-Njaro mountains.

The smell was so overpoweringly sweet and delicious, after the toil of our long march and the arid wastes through which we had drearily toiled, knee-deep in hot sand that had burnt the soles of our feet through our boots, that I really could not help

halting for a moment to inhale the soft perfumed air, which seemed to me like a breath from the portals of Paradise!

Leaning against one of the trees, a fine juniper it was, I had just taken off my cap to wipe the perspiration that was rolling down my face like rain, it having been a stiff climb upwards from the undulating country below, besides having to battle, too, with the brushwood most of the way, and the creepers that hung down from the branches, making some of the places through which we passed perfect jungles of massed vegetation, when, all of a sudden, a big hairy hand clutched me round the throat and I felt myself drawn up into the tree.

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## **Chapter Twenty Seven.**

### **A Regular Scrimmage!**

I believe the delicious perfume that permeated the air had almost lulled me to sleep for the moment, when I was rudely roused up by feeling the grip on my throat. "Belay that, Larry," cried I, fancying that my practical-joking friend had stolen a march on me, thinking to catch me napping, speaking without even taking the trouble to open my eyes. "A lark's a lark, old chap: but you needn't squeeze my throat so beastly hard, Larry!"

The pressure of his fingers, as I thought, continuing and absolutely causing me considerable pain, as well as throttling me, while I felt myself drawn up, as I have stated, into the lower branches of the tree against which I had been leaning, I quickly opened my eyes.

Heavens, I was horrified!

The hand that I fancied was the hand of Larry and which he had clasped round my neck in joke, was one of the great hairy paws of a huge baboon, who, with his grinning face shoved close to mine, was trying his best to choke me in grim earnest; while, getting a purchase with the other paw on to a projecting limb of the juniper-tree, he was slowly hoisting me aloft.

His grip was so strong that I felt powerless in his grasp; but, all the same, I was not going to give in to a brute of a monkey without making a fight for it!

So, feeling for the lanyard of my knife, I drew this out of its sheath and gave Jocko's elder brother a slash across his wrist that must have tickled him up a bit, the blood from the beast's paw shooting over my face in a stream, while he let go his hold of me.

Hardly had I reached the ground, however, touching mother earth again with a jerk that nearly dislocated my ankles, besides making me fall sideways all a-sprawled, than the baboon, giving vent to a vicious snarl, caught hold of my left leg with both his paws, just as a dog might seize a bone, and bit me savagely with his tusk-like teeth.

Fortunately, all of us were in full marching rig with gaiters on, and this protection prevented the baboon's teeth from penetrating far into my flesh, though he made his mark on my unfortunate calf.

Then, on my prodding him in one of his hind legs, which I clutched in my turn, thinking such a procedure only fair play, the beast dropped the gaiter he was busy gnawing up, and made at me with a howl, endeavouring to clutch me again in his hairy hug.

But, dropping on one knee, I gave him an upper cut with my doubled fist right under the brute's chin, which prevented this movement; and the next moment, falling back, when I jumped on top of him, he and I were rolling over and over, locked together, the baboon and I, in each other's arms, and engaged in one of the biggest rough-and-tumble fights I ever had the pleasure of participating in!

The big brute, though, was so strong and muscular that he got the better of me after a bit, tearing all the clothes off me with the long nails he had at the ends of his toes and human-like fingers, besides biting me in the most savage fashion wherever he saw an opening.

I thought my last hour had come.

But, help was at hand.

As I gasped and struggled frantically with the ferocious monster, feeling my strength ebbing away so fast that I had hardly power enough to protect my face from the brute's cruel claws, I heard a hoarse shout and a rapid footstep near me crunching on the ground.

Then.

'Bang!' came, the report of a rifle close to my ear, and the baboon's bloody body fell back on top of me, the beast having been shot as dead as a herring.

"Lor', Tom," exclaimed Larrikins, hauling away the carcass of the baboon, which I subsequently learnt was a species of the mandrill, common in the north-eastern and central parts of Africa, "I wer' only in the nick o' time! Why didn't yer call out, chummy?"

"How could I, Larry?" said I, after he had put his water-bottle to my mouth and brought me round a bit, so that I was able to sit up and speak. "The beast had me round the neck and I couldn't have shouted or even whispered to save my life."

"Well, ye wouldn't 'a saved it, me joker, if I hadn't missed yer all of a suddink," replied Larrikins, grinning; for I believe he could not have helped laughing, his disposition was so humorous, if a fellow had told him his father was dead! "I wer' a-wondering where yer wer', Tom, when I see'd a troop of big black monkeys makin' fur this very grove where we is. Wonderin' if they was them beasts that Swahili chap told us on, I follered 'em up; and then, all at onst, I see'd ye, Tom, a-strugglin' with that beast theer, and I comes up at the double and puts my rifle inter his ear and blows his bloomin' brains out, jest as ye was well-nigh spent, me joker."

"Thank you, Larry," said I; "you've saved my life."

"All right," he replied jokingly, pulling me up and rubbing me down, helping to arrange my tattered jumper and trousers, which that devil of a baboon had nearly torn to pieces; his bites, luckily for me, not being as bad as they had seemed, now that the blood was rubbed off. "I hopes, Tom, ye'll remember me in yer will when ye're dead, me joker!"

"I will do better than that," said I, as we both moved off to join some of the other bluejackets scouting away behind us, who had come up during the stoppage of our march through the wild country. "I will remember you, Larry, as long as I live!"

The surgeon accompanying our column presently came up to me and neatly strapped up the cuts which the baboon had inflicted on me with his teeth. He wanted me to retire to the rear and stop with the baggage guard; but, I would have none of that, no, not I!

"I would rather go on, sir, if you will allow me," said I. "Now that I have rested and you have put that stuff on the wounds, I feel all right again, sir; and I don't want to be left out of the fighting and lose the chance of paying out those Arab beggars for a few scratches like these. Why, sir, chaps that don't know me would say that I was a coward!"

"Very good, my lad," said the surgeon good-humouredly, for he was a rare good fellow, and a prime favourite with all on board the *Mermaid*; "you can go on with the column if you like. We want such men as you in the battle front; and, I think, we generally have them, too!" I therefore resumed my place in the ranks, though let off scouting duty, as was Larry, the two of us being now relieved by fresh hands from amongst the bluejackets; and so, I now marched along with the column, which pursued its way onward steadily inland, steering the same west south-west course, until we had travelled some fifteen miles away from our base.

We halted for the night on a beautiful grassy plain, covered with red and white clover, with thistles and dog-roses and dandelions intermixed, such as one might see on the outskirts of many an English wood in the south; while, there we were in the heart of Africa, so to speak!

Shortly after we encamped here, a runner brought news from the admiral to our captain, telling him that the other column had reached the position assigned to it in the original plan of operations and that they were now within good striking distance of the Arabs, who, the chief wrote word, were massed in the vicinity of Arabuku, which after executing our long *détour* we also were near.

All our preparations being thus complete, 'old Hankey Pankey' arranged for us to break camp at four o'clock the next morning, and move off to where the Somalis and their allies were said by the natives to be intrenched in strong force, so as to take them in the rear while the admiral made a front attack.

No bugle, though, sounded to rouse us when day broke in the African forest and the rosy light of dawn came peeping through the trees, brightening the green sheen of their leaves and making the dewdrops glisten on the clover, the scene reminding me more of home than anything I had seen since I left Spithead.

But, neither I nor any one else had much time for such reflections that morning as we silently paraded before 'old

Hankey Pankey' and the other officers; and, after a careful inspection of our arms, we started in a bee-line for Arabuku, the men massed four deep, with the guns in the centre of our column and flanking parties on the right and left, 'old Hankey Pankey,' of course, let him alone for that, leading the van.

At five o'clock, just as the old sun appeared in full splendour above the tops of the hills on our left, a halt was ordered by the captain, the word being passed quietly along the ranks from front to rear.

I was on the right flank, close to 'old Hankey Pankey' as he brought us up in this sudden fashion, so I heard every word he said to Mr Gresham, who marched by his side; though, for that matter, I almost guessed what was coming, from the captain wheeling round abruptly and stopping the sort of half trot at which he had been going along, the poor gentleman never having quite recovered the use of his legs after the matchlock ball had ventilated them.

"I think this was about the spot, Gresham, eh?" said he to the first lieutenant. "The admiral said we were to proceed four miles due south from our encampment at Kilili, or whatever else that place was called by our Swahili guide."

"Yes, sir," replied Mr Gresham. "I think we have about covered that distance by now; and our course has been true by compass, I know."

"Yes, yes," said 'old Hankey Pankey,' as if thinking over the matter—"yes. Got the rockets ready, Mr—ahem—Shrapnell?"

"Aye, aye, sir," replied 'Gunnery Jack,' who had come up from his guns, on the halt being cried, to see whether the captain might not have any special orders for him. "They're close at hand, sir."

"The signal rockets, I mean."

"Yes, sir, I'm speaking of the signal rockets," replied Mr Shrapnell, with never a movement on his face, but looking grave as a judge. "I thought you'd want them, sir, so I brought them along with me. Adams here, sir, has them in his charge. The other rockets with the tube for firing them are with the guns in the centre of the main column."

"That's right, Mr Shrapnell; tell Adams to get one of the signals ready for sending up at once, for I expect to see the admiral's

every minute," said 'old Hankey Pankey'; adding, as 'Gunnery Jack' stepped back to prepare the signal rocket with Adams, "That chap thinks himself very smart with his rocket and tube, as if I didn't know the real difference between the two! It's just like those gunnery fellows. They think nobody can be as sharp as themselves; but Mr Shrapnell will find himself too sharp for himself as well as for me some day, if he doesn't look out!"

Almost as he said this, we could hear the 'whis-s-ish' of a rocket going up in the distance, the sound seeming to come from a point in the bush about a mile or so ahead of us; and then, the bright blue and red globules of fire that followed the burst of the warning signal were seen the very next moment, high in the air above the trees in front, slowly sinking as their light died away out of sight.

"Stand by there!" shouted 'old Hankey Pankey' to Adams, who had our return signal rocket all ready, slung on to a handspike for a stick. "Here's my cigar, set fire to it with that."

He handed him as he thus spoke the manilla which he had been smoking throughout our march, as if he were going to some picnic and probably feeling quite as jovial as if he had been; and, Adams at once setting light to the end of the rocket, it soared aloft like its compeer the moment before, with a wish and a rush that must have scared all the stray baboons within earshot of its flight.

Then we heard tom-toms beating close by, and the clash of brass or some other metal that had a ring like cymbals.

"They're waking up," cried 'old Hankey Pankey' to Mr Gresham, with a pleased smile on his face. "The column will now advance. Close your ranks, men. Keep steady. Forward!"

We had hardly taken a dozen paces, advancing in the same formation as before, when we heard the roar of guns in front and steady volleys of rifle-fire, whose sound clearly betokened that it emanated from weapons similar to our own.

"By George, we'll be too late!" cried 'old Hankey Pankey,' hobbling onwards at a fine rate for a moment, and then slewing round to give some fresh order to those following up behind. "Come on, men—come on at the double. Spread out your flanks, Mr Gresham! Spread out your flanks, d'ye hear? Tell Mr Shrapnell to bring up the guns. Spread out there, men—spread out in skirmishing order, to cover your front! Hang it, come on, my lads—come on, or we'll be too late!"



Captain Oliver of the *Merlin* was running us cheek by jowl with his contingent on the left and Commander Jellaby of the *Bullfinch* trying to outstrip him on our right; so, we had hard work to keep our place in line ahead.

But 'old Hankey Pankey' was not going to let any one, junior or senior in the service, beat him for first place when fighting was on; and no one who had known how terribly he had been wounded, the muscles of his legs having become shrunk after the holes made by the matchlock ball had closed up, would have dreamt him capable of going the pace he did now.

"Forward, men—forward!" he yelled out spasmodically, as he hobbled on like the wind in front, taking long hops at intervals over any obstruction that lay in his path. "*Mermaids* to the front! You're not going to let us be licked, men, by any other ship on the station!"

How he got out the words between his leaps, and bounds, and hops, I am sure I cannot tell; but, get them out he did, though he must have been pretty well pumped out already by his exertions, and his breath nearly all spent.

But, we hardly needed the stimulus to prompt us to action; for in barely another half minute we burst out of the bush, going at the double and spread out in a half circle, so as to catch all stragglers who might have vainly hoped to escape in our direction, for we were right in the rear of the Arab town.

This was already all ablaze from the rockets and bursting shells of the admiral's brigade, the straw-thatched houses as they looked, though they were really covered with dry plantain and banana leaves, burning up like so many fierce bonfires in our front, and right and left; while the sharp rattle of musketry and loud banging of the guns of the first division was mixed up with the platoon-like reports from the matchlocks of the Somalis, who were urging on their somewhat reluctant allies, the slave-traders of the interior, with hoarse yells and shrill screams, bolstering up their courage likewise by the beating of innumerable gongs and clashing cymbals, the consensus of sound making din enough to have wakened up all the dead dervishes of the desert for generations past, and caused them, had they come to life, to have proclaimed a 'Jehad' or holy war against us, and thus roused up all the fanaticism of all those of the Moslem race yet left alive!

Such was our grand rush, however, coming as it did on top of the cleverly planned combined attack of the admiral's columns

in front of the town, thus taking the Arabs between two fires, that even Saladin would not have saved them.

Hundreds of them were shot down behind their stockades, which I must say they defended gallantly to the last; while those who were not potted by our bullets, were 'put out of action' by the bayonets of us bluejackets, who carried their intrenchments by storm.

So far, I was only one of the crowd, loading and firing my Martini as I advanced or halted on the word of command being given by 'old Hankey Pankey'; who, plucky as a lion, was in the forefront all through, his uniform cap tumbled off and his face all blackened with powder, 'potting' this chap with the revolver that he held in his left hand, or sticking another Somali through the gizzard with his sword, which was always thrust out straight before him as he went onward, and always 'at the point.'

But, now, I had a little diversion on my own account.

"Left turn!" shouted our company leader Mr Chisholm, whose sharp eye detected through the smoke a body of the Arabs attacking an officer and a detached party of our men who had escalated the fortifications on the right of the town; and seeing that they were hard pressed, though making a gallant stand of it against heavy odds, our officer quickly called out, "Double! Charge, my lads!"

By George! We did charge; and then, the bronze-coloured beggars, who had thought to make an easy prey of our before isolated comrades, turned savagely to receive us, a whole horde of them!

Larrikins, who was next me, got his right arm transfixed by one of their light spears or jereeds, a lot of which came whistling through the air into our ranks like a flight of sparrows.

This made Larry drop his rifle like a hot potato; but, nothing daunted, he kept alongside of me all the same, drawing his cutlass as we raced along together.

"Lor', Tom, that wer' a nipper, that wer'!" he cried, with a grin on his face, as if the wound were rather a joke than otherwise. "But I'm jiggered if I don't pay out the joker who skewered me then!"

At that moment a couple of the Arabs made at the pair of us; and I had quite enough to do to guard off the shower of cuts

one of them delivered round my devoted head, his curved scimitar whirling about me in all directions and the sunlight from above making it flash so that it dazzled my eyes.

However, a lucky drive with my sword-bayonet through the rascal's throat stopped his little game; for the swarthy Arab dropped his scimitar instanter, with a gurgle of rage and an upward roll of his eyes, "like a dying duck in a thunder-storm," as father used to say, tumbling down all of a heap as dead as mutton.

Hardly had I done with him when, strange to say, I heard the bark of a dog.

This was very unusual, all Mahometans hating dogs and believing them to be possessed of the Devil.

Besides, somehow or other, I seemed to recognise the bark as familiar to me; for, believe me, the voices of dogs and their respective expressions of grief or joy, though sounding the same to alien ears, are as distinct to such as are accustomed to hear them frequently as the voices of human beings of our acquaintance or any individual.

Before I had time to think, however, though my senses were all on the alert from hearing the dog's bark, I saw that the naval officer whom we had rushed up to help at Mr Chisholm's instigation, was engaged in a fierce hand-to-hand fight with two Arabs, one of whom, a tall, lean Somali, with a peculiar sort of turban round his head, unlike any of those sported by the rest of the gang, I was certain was no less a personage than the man, or 'sheik' as he was called, Abdalah, the leader of the Somalis.

As I noted this, the officer fell; but, ere the big Arab, who drew back a long spear that he wielded, could give him the fatal thrust he intended, I was upon him.

Clubbing my rifle, I dealt a vicious blow at the savage brute's head which shattered the spear wherewith he tried to guard it.

The rascal, though, was not discomfited; for, clutching hold of a tulwar he carried loosely in a sash of the old dressing-gown-like garment he wore, he almost slashed my nose off, the barrel of my Martini only just preventing me from losing all my good looks!

The shock sent me on my knees; and then, seeing a sword lying on the ground in front of me, I gripped hold of this more by instinct than anything else, and I rose to my feet again as quick as lightning.

Quick as I was, however, the brute of an Arab was quicker; and, aiming a terrible slashing cut at me with the tulwar, which had it landed would have decapitated me as clean as a whistle, and the last word of my history been told for good and all—aye, but for a wonderful interposition just as I thought my end had come.

With a piercing yelp, that was succeeded by a deep, savage growl, a white dog bounded up from the ground beside the officer, who had not yet recovered from the effects of the blow that had struck him down.

Would you believe it, this dog was 'Gyp'!

Making a jump which no one could have imagined a dog of his size capable of doing, he clutched the Arab chief by the throat as he slashed at me, making him stumble back, thus causing the cut that would otherwise have sliced off my head like a carrot to be wasted in the air.

As the big murdering rascal stumbled back, I thrust forth my arm holding the officer's sword and sent the blade right through the beggar's stomach up to the hilt.

"Be the powers, me joker," cried a voice behind me, as sheik and 'Gyp' and I all fell together on the ground in one batch, "ye did that well, alannah! Begorrah, it wor roight in his bri'd-basket, sure!"

"My goodness!" I exclaimed, recognising a voice that sounded as familiar to my ears as the bark of 'Gyp' just now. "Who's that?"

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## **Chapter Twenty Eight.**

### **Warm Greetings.**

"Tom, don't ye know me, owld chappie?" cried Mick, for, of course, it was him; though, what with my deadly struggle and rescue by 'Gyp,' whom I thought thousands of miles away,

besides the fact of my old chum coming so unexpectedly on the scene, I felt perfectly bewildered, thinking that I must be in a dream. "Begorra, ye're starin' at me, sure, ez if I wor a ghost or a banshee, bedad!"

"Really, Mick," said I, when I could at length speak and was convinced that it was himself in proper person and no phantom of my imagination, gripping his fist in a hearty grasp that expressed more than I could say and which he understood better than all the words in the world, "you don't mean to say it's you! How did you come here?"

"Faith, on the sowl of me fat," he answered, with his jolly laugh, speaking in that racy brogue which sounded like music, it being so long since I had heard it. "Sure, Oi've marched oop from the coast the same ez yersilf, alannah!"

"But," said I, still wondering at the unlooked-for sight of him there all of a sudden like that, "I thought you were on the West Coast, cruising about the Bight of Benin, or up the Niger, or somewhere thereabouts?"

"So I wor," he replied, with a grin at the stupefied look on my face; "but you forgits, Tom, our squadron's coom round here with the admiral to give ye a hilping hand, sure, in yer shindy with these blissid Arab thayves here. So, faith, Oi've coom along with the rest in the owld *Grampus*, bedad. But, Oi'm lookin' for our cap'en now. Have you sayn him, Tom, at all—he wor in the thick of the foightin' jist now summat about heres?"

"Your cap'en," said I, trying to repress 'Gyp's' frantic joy at seeing me again; the faithful animal, who had stuck to the Arab chief with a tenacious grip, only releasing him when he was assured of his not being likely to trouble any of us any more, now coming up to me and springing up, trying to lick my face as he yelped and whined with delight. "Who is your cap'en?"

"Why, Tom, I thought you knowed," he replied, looking from me down at 'Gyp,' whose stumpy tail, and every hair on his white coat as well, seemed on the wag, his excited affections only finding outlet in this way. "Faith, he's Cap'en Sackville, to be sure, be all the powers!"

"What—"

"Yis," said Mick Donovan before I could get any further, answering my unasked question; "the same ez we lied aboard with us in the owld *Saint Vincent*."

I was dumbfounded.

"What an ass I am!" I jerked out, shaking off poor 'Gyp,' and proceeding to where the officer lay on the ground a little way from us, stretched out face downwards. "I ought to have known it was him from seeing the dog!"

"Aye, sure, it is him thrue enuff," said Mick, stooping down and raising up the prostrate figure in his arms. "Them murdering thayves hev kilt the poor cap'en entoirely!"

Mick's dead man, however, did a most extraordinary thing for one who was supposed to have departed this life.

He first sneezed, and then opened his eyes.

Next he spoke.

"Where am I? Ah, yes, I recollect," he faltered out slowly, his wits beginning to work, and his memory coming back to him; when, all of a sudden, catching sight of my face as I loosened his collar and sprinkled some water from my bottle over his head to bring him to, he uttered a quick cry. "Ah, it's you, Tom Bowling—I remember you quite well. I thought it was, my lad, before I lost my consciousness. It is you, then, whom I have to thank for saving my life just now?"

"How—why," I stammered, not knowing well what to say—"what, sir?"

"Oh yes, Bowling; you can't get out of it," he said in a firmer voice, and the old pleasant smile I recollect when he gave me that half-crown in his cabin on board the old training-ship that I spoke of at the beginning of my yarn. "I saw you quite plainly, my lad, as you rushed up to my succour when those Arabs nearly settled me. There were two of them attacking me at the same time, one before and one behind, and if you had not come up I think they'd have settled me."

"I hope, sir," said I, as Mick and I raised him up between us into a sitting posture—'Gyp' watching the operation with a most intense interest and pleasure, his little black muzzle working, and his short tail wagging all the time—"I do hope you are not seriously hurt, sir?"

Captain Sackville drew a deep breath and shook himself.

"No," he said—"no bones broken, I think; but, I have got a bullet through one shoulder, I believe, for I can't lift my right hand—that's how I came to drop my sword, which I see you have, Bowling."

"Yes, sir," said I quietly, glancing to where the Somali chief was doubled up. "I paid off your score against that beggar over there with it, sir."

"Indeed!" said Captain Sackville, trying to rise up on his legs, but falling back with a groan. "O-o-oh! I think that fellow gave me a bad thrust in the chest just before I dropped it; but, I declare I forgot all about it!"

Mick and I at once tore open his tunic and shirt, when we found a deep wound on his right side, from which the captain must have lost a good deal of blood, his clothing being quite saturated; but the wound was not bleeding much now and we bound it up with our two silk handkerchiefs, winding them round his body, which relieved him so much that he was able to stand up on his feet.

The battle between our forces and the foe was now pretty nigh over, and the combatants had long since swept past us; pursuers and pursued having alike disappeared in the bush surrounding the native town or lost to sight amid the smoking ruins, where some little desultory skirmishing was still going on.

Presently, however, a grand hurrah went up on the left, where the Somalis had made their last stand.

It was a cheer such as British bluejackets alone can give; and then we saw the Union Jack run up on the top of a big bungalow in the centre of the town, the only hut or building that had escaped destruction in the general conflagration.

"It's all over, my lads," said Captain Sackville on hearing and seeing this. "I think we had better see about joining the main column, and pick up any stragglers we may see in want of assistance by the way."

But we came across none in any need of help, save such offices as the dead require, along our route to the front; for, wherever we noticed any groups of bodies together, all alike, whether bluejacket or Arab, were stone dead.

Bullet and knife and sword had each and all had a busy day of it!

After burying the dead with all the honours of war, the corpse of the Arab chief I had killed with Captain Sackville's sword being identified formally as that of the notorious Abdalah, as I had thought, our columns returned to the coast in triumph with the proud consciousness of having cleared the country of all the invading Somalis.

The bluejackets and marines belonging to the admiral's division then rejoined their ships at Mombassa; while our contingent, led still by 'old Hankey Pankey,' who was none the worse for the fray, retraced their steps through Teita and the 'baboon valley'—where, I may add, I met no second mishap—to Malindi.

We again went on board the *Mermaid*; and, to cut a long story short, the captain, who was very pleased with what he had seen of me during the campaign, besides my having a good word put in by Captain Sackville, promoted me to 'leading seaman' the very next day.

Naturally, I was very sorry to part company with Mick so soon after our long separation; but, as I have said before, a sailor's life is made up of partings.

Here besides, as things turned out, no great period elapsed ere we hove in sight of each other again; aye, under circumstances, too, that have caused us to become closer companions than ever, as indeed we are now.

I will tell you how this was.

Not many months after our smashing up the Arabs and driving the Somalis out of the British protectorate back to their own inhospitable country, the *Mermaid's* commission expired; when, instead of the cruiser going home to be paid off, a new crew was sent out to us from England, she still remaining on the station, in accordance with the routine at present in vogue.

The old *Dromedary*, that brought out our relief, which has cruised more thousands of miles, I believe, on such fetching and carrying work than have ever been covered by the oldest ship in the Navy, took us back home in her; and she called in at Simons Bay, en route, to fill up with supernumeraries and other paid-off crews from ships belonging to the Cape station.

Amongst those that came on board here were the officers and men of the *Grampus*, including none others than Captain Sackville, who had quite recovered from his wounds, Mick Donovan, and 'Gyp.'



I need hardly say what a jolly passage home we all had; Larrikins and Mick and I, with some other old shipmates of the *Saint Vincent*, yarning all the way from morning till night, not much work being wanted of us as we had fine weather throughout; while 'Gyp,' who still retained his affection for me, exhibited his old bias for lower deck company and could not be kept away from the fo'c's'le where we were.

Captain Sackville, of course, noticed this, but he was not a bit angry at it; and, on our leaving the old *Dromedary* at Portsmouth, where we finally arrived safe and sound after a pretty speedy passage for such an old tub, he gladdened my heart when saying farewell by making me a present of 'Gyp.'

"Begorrah," as Mick related to Larrikins subsequently, when we returned to the depot, after our customary payoff leave ashore, "ye nivver sayd sich a coomin' home, sure, ez Tom hed, an' me too, bedad, whin we got up to the owld cottage at Bonfoire Corner. Sure, there wor Tom's fayther a-sottin' in the garden in his owld armchair under the mulberry-tree, faith, afther Miss Jenny resayved us at the door—"

"Ah," interposed Larrikins at this point, with a knowing wink. "But, what o' Tom's sister? Yer ain't told us about her at all, chummy. Did she give ye a kiss, now?"

"Git away wid ye," cried Mick, giving him a dig in his ribs, and grinning the while all over his face at the recollection of something about which I might have told a tale if I had liked, before proceeding to go on with his story of the warm reception we had met with.

"Well, thin, Tom's fayther wor a-sottin' in the armchair, ez I wor a-sayin' whin you put me off me coorse, Larry, ye baste. Tom wor goin' on ahid, wid 'Gyp' a-kapin' behoind him, an' Oi, sure, behoind him agin wid Miss Jenny, whin the monkey Jocko, who wor alongside of Tom's fayther, catches sight of 'Gyp,' and makes for the to'-gallant crosstrees ov the mulberry-tree, faith. Now, Larry, ye moost rimimber the owld cockatoo 'Ally Sloper' wor alriddy oop there aloft; an' whin the burrd says Jocko makin' fur him, he oop stick, or rayther oop wid his crist an' flies down roight atop ov Tom's hid, shraykin' out, 'Say-rah, Say-rah!' as loud as the divvle could bawl. 'Gyp' on this starts barkin' loike mad at the blissid cockatoo; whin down cooms Masther Jocko fur to have his share in the foight. Begorrah, ye nivver sayd sich a rumpus in yer loife, Larry, 'specially whin Tom's fayther got overturned in his armchair an' Misthress Bowlin' came out fur to say wot all the row was about; whoile

Miss Jenny an' Tom an' me, sure, wor all a-dyin' wid larfin', bedad!"

I may add, in conclusion, that Mick and I went from the depot to the *Excellent*, to go through a regular course of gunnery, preparatory to our aspiring to the grade of 'petty officer'; and I hope, as my old friend the 'Jaunty' of the *Saint Vincent* prophesied, to rise bye-and-bye to the rank of 'warrant.'

It is a pity, though, that no chance is yet afforded in our service in the present day, as used to be the case in the past, when many an admiral 'crept through the hawsehole,' as the saying was, for respectable young fellows of good education and bright abilities to look any higher; but, it is to be hoped that the day will come, as father's old friend Captain Mordaunt said only the other day when talking to us both under the old mulberry-tree in our garden, when this state of things will be changed, and a boy who enters the service as I did on board one of our training-ships, will, as Bonaparte said the conscript carried a field-marshal's baton in his knapsack, keep snugly stowed away an admiral's cocked hat in his ditty box!

However, be that as it may, and whether I ever rise to quarter-deck rank or not, I have not a single regret at having ever joined the Navy; for, no one glories more than I in serving our Queen and country under the grand old flag that floats supreme over every sea where ship may sail. Aye, and my proud boast is that I am still 'Young Tom Bowling,' my dear old father being yet alive; and that I am one of 'the Boys of the British Navy.'

**The End.**

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